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THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA,  
No. LXXIX.  
AND  
BIBLICAL REPOSITORY,  
No. CXXXI.  

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JULY, 1868.

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ARTICLE I.

SIN, AS RELATED TO HUMAN NATURE AND TO THE  
DIVINE PURPOSE.

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THERE is, perhaps, no one topic in the whole province of theological investigation that presents to the philosophic and thoughtful inquirer more, or more formidable, problems than the doctrine of sin. It meets him in every direction, and always with a difficulty. Whether he turn his thoughts to the divine or human side of theology, Godward or manward, in either case he comes directly upon this strange and unaccountable phenomenon. It stands like some fearful spectre in his path, barring further progress; and he may well exclaim, with Milton's angel:

“ Whence and what art thou, execrable shape,  
That darest oppose my way ? ”

There are two aspects in which this doctrine is of special moment to the theological inquirer: one is, the relation which it sustains to *the nature of man*; the other, its relation to *the divine will and purpose*. It is the object of the following pages, not to offer new opinions, or advance a new

theory, on these topics — that would be difficult to do, and of little use withal; but rather to gather up in a resumé, at once historic and critical, the leading theories which have been already advanced in respect to these disputed points. It is in this direction, perhaps, that progress can best be made, if made at all, in the science of theology, as regards matters which have been so long and so widely under discussion, as those now indicated. And first:

#### THE RELATION OF SIN TO HUMAN NATURE.

That human nature is corrupt is too evident to admit of serious question. The universal prevalence of sin; its early manifestation and spontaneous development, under all possible varieties of condition and circumstance; the difficulty with which it is in any case resisted and overcome; the certainty with which it may be predicted in the future history of any human being just entering on a career of moral agency, all point in one direction, — all go to show that the evil is not accidental, but radical, and that its root is deep in our nature. The propensity to sin must be innate, else why these characteristics? What better evidence can we have that any propensity, disposition, or trait of character is native than that which is thus afforded?

The great problem is, not to *establish* the fact, for that is already clear; but to *account* for it. Two questions, in fact, demand solution. Its *origin*: whence comes this innate propensity to evil in man? Its *morality*: is such a propensity in itself culpable? These are questions which no thoughtful mind will lightly ask, or answer without careful reflection.

1. *Its origin: How comes man to have a nature thus corrupt?*

To this, many answers have been given. The several possible solutions may be resolved, if we mistake not, into the following: A. It is supposable, that this nature was *originally implanted by the Creator*. B. It is supposable, that it was *acquired in some previous state of being, as*

consequence of some sinful act on the part of each individual. C. It is supposable that it is *derived from a sinful ancestry*, in whose loss of innocence their whole posterity is involved. This latter, again, admits of threefold statement, according as we suppose this derivation of corrupt nature to occur: *a.* by virtue of the *generic unity* of the race, so that the sin of one man is the sin of the whole; or: *b.* by virtue of the *constructive unity* of the race with its first parent as representative or federal head; or: *c.* by virtue of *the laws of natural descent, like producing like.*

Of these several suppositions (A, B, C), each is possible, and one or other, it would seem, must be true. The innate propensity in man to sin must either be the work of God in his original creation, or else something which he has brought upon himself; if the latter, then it must have been in some previous state of being, or else by connection with a sinful ancestry in the present world.

Of these theories, the first (A) requires at present little discussion. To suppose God the author of a depraved constitution in man originally, is to make him really the author of sin. It is to suppose him planting with his own hand the seeds of evil, with absolute certainty of the result. God's work is not of that sort. What he makes is such that he can pronounce it very good. Man, as he comes from the hand of his Creator, is pure. How else could he be justly punished for sinning? It would be the height of injustice for God to endow man with a nature sure to lead to sin, and then punish him for sinning. Such inconsistency and injustice are surely not to be ascribed to the most perfect Being.

B. It is possible that the propensity in question comes over to us from a previous state of being, in consequence of sin there committed. This would seem to have been the view of Origen. It is advanced in our own time by two distinguished theologians, Dr. J. Müller of Germany, in his "Christian Doctrine of Sin," and Dr. Edward Beecher of this country, in his well-known "Conflict of Ages." Each, however, from a different point of view: Müller seeking

merely to account for the fact of universal sinfulness; Beecher, to justify the arrangement, on the part of God, by which man comes into the world with a depraved nature. Both find in this theory the only satisfactory solution of their problem.

Of this theory it may be said that, while it is certainly a possible, it is by no means a probable, supposition. It supposes too many things — things which not only *are* not, but, in the very nature of the case, *cannot* be, established on reasonable grounds — things which do not admit of proof. It supposes: 1. that each one of the race has had a previous existence. 2. That in that previous state he was a moral agent. 3. That in the exercise of his moral agency he sinned. 4. That he did so without any previous bias or propensity to sin; since this propensity is the very thing to be accounted for. 5. That his sin vitiated his nature. 6. That he brought that corrupt and vitiated nature with him into the present state of being.

Now all these propositions may be true; but there is no evidence that one of them is so — none from reason, none from revelation, none from consciousness. The only argument in its favor seems to be that *if* true, it might relieve the subject of certain difficulties. But this in itself is no proof of the theory. It may be that other methods will also relieve those difficulties. The key in my hand may possibly unlock the door, but other keys may also do the same. It may be, also, that in the present instance the difficulties are such as are not fully met by any theory yet proposed. It is by no means certain that the key in question really will fit the lock and open the door so long closed to human entrance. It is by no means certain that the divine character is to be cleared up, and the divine proceeding justified, by any such method.

The real difficulty is to see how it could consist with the wisdom and justice and goodness of God to place man, while yet sinless, in such circumstances that he would be likely, and even sure, to sin. But this is a difficulty which

presses equally on the theory of pre-existence. It has no advantage over any other theory, in this matter, since it too admits and pre-supposes that man *did* sin in that previous state, and of course that he was placed in such circumstances that his sin was not only possible and probable, but *sure* to occur, for it *did* occur. If it is wrong for God to place men here in such circumstances, and expose them to such influences that they will be quite sure to sin, why not equally unjust for him to do it there?

Nay, the difficulty is not only not relieved, but actually augmented, by the theory under consideration. If the problem is to explain how one pure-minded, sinless being, Adam by name, came to sin, it is surely no help towards its solution, to be told that the same thing happened once to every individual of the race—that every human being is, in fact, Adam. This is simply multiplying the difficulty by just the number of the human family. If the problem is to show how God could be just, and yet leave man in Paradise so unguarded that he would certainly fall, it is surely no relief to be told that he left not one but all human souls in that predicament.

Nor does the justice of the procedure shine forth more conspicuously in the subsequent stages of the process. To take each soul when once it has fallen and sinned, deprive it of its consciousness, of all consciousness of the past, reduce it to a condition of infantile weakness, subject it, in this condition and under these disadvantages, to a new probation, with the absolute certainty that thus placed it will sin, and to hang over it the doom of eternal death if under these circumstances it should sin,—all this, moreover, as the penalty of that previous transgression of which it is wholly unconscious—this is surely no material relief of the difficulty, nor a very satisfactory clearing up of the divine justice.

The theory fails, then, inasmuch as it presents a series of suppositions unsupported by evidence, incapable of proof, and which, even if admitted, tend rather to augment than to relieve the real difficulty.

C. Since theories A and B fail to meet the case, we have this supposition, that the depravity of human nature is derived from a sinful ancestry, in whose primal loss of innocence their whole posterity is, in some way, involved. There seems to be no other reasonable and probable supposition. This seems both reasonable and probable. To judge *a priori*, it would seem not unlikely that if man should fall it would affect his posterity in just this way—that they would follow the fortunes of the parent; not unlikely that God would choose to have it so. We do not know, indeed, that without special divine interposition it could be otherwise. It is the universal law of nature that like shall produce like. As the tree, so the fruit. It is the great law of nature, moreover, that the innocent suffer with the guilty; that, in many things, the consequences of transgression reach beyond the immediate actor, and fall with crushing weight on those who are not personally responsible for the deed. It would be quite in keeping with both these great laws, were the vitiated and corrupt nature of fallen Adam to become the nature also of his whole posterity.

With this view both the teaching of scripture and the facts of the world's history correspond. In the narrative of the fall we have the only authentic account of the first entrance of sin into our world. It is an undeniable fact that human depravity has existed ever since that first sin of the first man, and that, without exception, all his descendants partake of that moral nature which belonged to him after that event. These facts indicate a close connection of the two things. Such a connection is evidently implied in the scriptures, and in some passages directly affirmed. We are told that by one man sin came into the world, and death by sin; and that the consequence was universal sinfulness and universal death.<sup>1</sup> In succeeding verses of the same chapter the idea is resumed and repeated. It was by the disobedience of the one that the many

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 12.

became sinners, even as it is by the obedience of one that many are justified.<sup>1</sup> In these passages the sinfulness of the race is plainly ascribed to the apostacy of Adam, as the occasion and origin of the same — the fountain whence that sad and terrible consequence has flowed, and is still flowing, through the long dark ages of the world's history.

This has been, accordingly, the view generally received in the Christian church from the first. In this the great body of those who adopt the Christian system agree, both Old and New school, Calvinist and Arminian. As to the *nature* of the connection, they differ; as to the *fact* of a connection, they agree.

To the different views respecting the nature of this connection, the manner in which the depravity of the race links itself with, and proceeds from, the sin of the first parent, let us now turn our attention. As already stated, the subordinate theories are these :

a. That of the *generic unity* of the race, as virtually one with Adam, existing in him, sinning in him — his sin their sin. This is probably the earliest theory on this subject. It regards the act of Adam as the act of the race. The common nature of the race existed in him. He was the genus, comprising within itself all the species and individuals subsequently to be, as the first oak contained within itself all future oaks. The race was in him, not indeed in an individual capacity, but generically, and so sinned in him not as individuals, but as to the generic nature. The theory is closely related to the realism of Plato, and the Platonic and new Platonic schools. It has found adherents, for the most part, among the admirers and disciples of that philosophy. It was thus with Augustine. Accustomed to the realistic mode of thought, trained to regard abstractions as realities, and to merge the individual in the genus, his theology on this point was simply the natural outgrowth of his philosophy. Mised, doubtless, he may have been, in part, by the Vulgate version of Rom. v. 12, in *quo* omnes peccaverunt, as he, in

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 18, 19.



turn, misled others (e. g. the synod of Carthage) by his exposition of that passage; but such a mind as his could hardly have been thus misled by any single verse or version, however faulty, had not a false philosophy, and a wrong habit of thought thus induced, prepared him to be easily thus misled. It is not so much the Vulgate version as the Platonic realism that speaks through Augustine in such utterances as these: "All men sinned in him, inasmuch as all *were ille unus*." "Those who were afterwards to be many out of him, were then one in him." "All were in that individual, and all those *were he*, none of whom as yet existed individually." "In which one all have sinned in common, previously to personal sins of each one as an individual."<sup>1</sup>

The theory under consideration may be regarded as properly that of Augustine, to whom it is indebted for its leading features, if not strictly for its origin. It soon became the prevalent theory of the Latin Fathers, more especially of the African church. The theologians of the Middle Ages found it quite accordant with their speculative views. The Reformers, in many instances, adopted it. In the twelfth century, Odo, bishop of Cambrai, gives it clear and precise statement. "My mind was in him [Adam], not as a person, but as a component part of the species; not in my individual nature, but in the common nature. For the common nature of every human mind was guilty of sin in Adam. Therefore every human mind was guilty of sin in Adam. Therefore every human mind is blameworthy in respect to its nature, but not in respect to its person. Therefore the sin by which we sinned in Adam is to me a sin of my nature; in Adam it was a personal sin. I sinned in him, not as *I*, but as this substance which I am. I sinned as *man*, not as *Odo*," that is, as genus, not as individual.<sup>2</sup> Among the moderns we find Owen, a realist

<sup>1</sup> See for the above and similar passages, de Pec. Mer. I. 10; Op. Imp. IV. 104; Ep. 194, c. 6; de Civ. Dei, XIII. See also MÜNCHER von CÖLN and WIGGERS (Emerson's Tr.) for similar statements.

<sup>2</sup> See Odo on Original Sin, Bib. Vet. Pat., Vol. XXI.

and Platonist, holding the same view. It is maintained by Dr. Baird, in his "Elohim Revealed."

In a modified form, this view is held also by President Edwards. The race is one with Adam, according to his view, not indeed as the genus is comprehensive of the species and of the individuals which it contains under it, but rather by an absolute, divinely-constituted unity, by virtue of which his sin is as truly theirs as the sin of a man to-day is his also to-morrow. It rests on the principle that God can make anything to be one and identical with anything else that he chooses. In common with the Augustinian theory, this maintains the essential unity of the race with Adam, so that his sin is really and truly, not by construction or imputation merely, the sin of all his posterity. All men are truly and properly guilty of his sin, and for it deserve eternal death.

With respect to the merits of this theory, it is scarcely necessary to remark that it is based on a false philosophy. The race is not one with Adam in such a sense as that here intended. His act is not, and cannot be, literally the act of the race. Whether we define sin as properly an act, or as both an act and also a state, in either case it is the act or the state of a personal moral being; none other can sin. It was as a personal moral being that Adam sinned. We, his descendants, were not then in existence as personal beings, and of course could not have sinned in his transgression, nor have shared the guilt of it. If it be said, human nature was summed up in him, we reply, a nature may be vitiated, as no doubt human nature was in him, its origin and fountain, but a nature does not sin, for it is not a personal being. To say that the race, as such, sinned in its progenitor, is simply to personify an abstraction. Abstractions do not sin.

Nor is it better to resolve the thing, with Edwards, into an arbitrary act of divine power. It is not within the province of Omnipotence to make things which are really distinct identical with each other. God cannot make the

act of Caesar or of Ghengis Khan to be, truly and properly, my act. He may impute it to me, treat me as if it were mine, punish me for it; but that does not make it mine. Nay, if I commit the very same sin, in other words do the same thing, it will still be true that the act of Caesar is his, and my act is mine, and no power in the universe can make them identical.

Further than this, we are disposed to ask why that *one* act of Adam, that is the first sin, should be ours also, more than any other, and all other, subsequent acts and sins of the same individual? If the race was in him, generically and seminally, in his *first* transgression, it was so in his *second* and his *third*. All his acts are our acts, as really as the first transgression, at least until the race begins to diverge into its separate individual life. Even then, for aught we see, the same law holds in the direct line of descent. The race lies as really summed up in Seth and Enos as it did in Adam. Are their sins also ours? Why not, on this theory? Did we not exist generically in Seth, and afterward in Noah? In fact, are not all the sins of all our progenitors in danger of coming down upon our heads, on this theory, unless we stand from under it? And still further, why are not all our posterity sinning in us, on the same principle?

From some passages in his writings, it would seem that these logical consequences of his theory did not escape the mind of Augustine, and that he was not disposed to shrink from them. He thinks it not *improbable* "that children are liable for the sins, not only of the first pair, but also of those from whom they are born," and that the sins of ancestors *universally* are the heritage of their descendants. "But respecting the sins of the other parents," he says, "the progenitors from Adam down to one's own immediate father, it may not improperly be debated, whether the child is implicated in the evil acts and multiplied original faults of all, so that each one is the worse in proportion as he is the later; or that in respect to the sins of their parents,

God threatens posterity to the third and fourth generation, because, by the moderation of his compassion, he does not further extend his anger in respect to the faults of progenitors, lest those on whom the grace of regeneration is not conferred should be pressed with too heavy a load in their own eternal damnation, if they were compelled to contract, by way of origin, the sins of *all* their preceding parents from the commencement of the human race, and to suffer the punishment due for them.”<sup>1</sup>

*b.* Passing from this, we have, next, the theory of the *constructive* unity of the race with Adam, as its federal head and representative, by virtue of a special covenant made with him to that effect. The sin of Adam is not *really* and *properly* that of the race, but only by *construction*. He acts for the whole by special divine arrangement. It is *as if* they were there and sinned, each in person. Such, it is maintained, is the relation of the race to the first parent, as to justify such an arrangement, and constitute the ground of it. In him the race stands its probation. He represents them in the whole transaction. In him they are tried, in him they sin, with him they fall. Forensically his sin is their sin. To them it is reckoned or imputed *as if* it were theirs.

The two theories (*a.* and *b.*) differ in this. According to *a.* the sin of Adam is *really* and *properly* the sin of the race, and is, therefore, imputed to all his descendants. According to *b.* it is *imputed* to them, and therefore, it is theirs. In the one case, it is mine because imputed; in the other, it is imputed because it is already mine.

The view now presented is that advocated in the Princeton Repertory, and in the Southern Presbyterian Review. It is, we suppose, the received doctrine of the Old school Presbyterian church. Among the Christian Fathers we find no distinct traces of this doctrine. It would seem to have originated with the schoolmen, and to have made little

<sup>1</sup> Euchir., c. 46, 47, as cited by Emerson in Wigger's Augustinism. See also comments of the translator on the above passage.

progress until after the sixteenth century. It became the favorite theory of the German Reformed theologians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was favored by some of the Lutherans of the same period.<sup>1</sup>

To this view, it occurs as a serious, if not fatal, objection, that, if the relation of the race to Adam is not such as to make us really and justly chargeable with his sin, then it is not such as to be a just ground for treating us *as if* we were chargeable with it. If his sin is not, as the former theory affirms, and as this denies, really and truly ours, then it is certainly not right and just to charge it to us, and to deal with us *as if* it were ours. It is a manifest injustice to impute to any man what does not really belong to him, in the way of evil, and then to treat him as if he were what the charge implies; and no covenant, real or imaginary, can make it otherwise. The covenant that does this is unjust. It would be a manifest wrong to hold any living man responsible for the sin of Cain, of Noah, or of David. But if the sin of Adam may be imputed to us, without personal participation of our own, why not the sins of any other ancestor, or predecessor? If we did not share in the transgression, how can we share in the guilt? Or, if made to share the guilt in the one case, why not also in the others? We do not see anything in the mere fact that Adam stands at the head of the race, stands first in the line, that can essentially change the relation of the parties, or make it right for us to be charged with his sins, more than if he stood second, tenth, or fiftieth, in the line of progenitorship. The relation itself constitutes no ground for such a transfer of guilt, in the one case more than the other, nor in either case; and if such transfer of blame and responsibility be made, it must be by virtue of an arrangement purely arbitrary, and which in any other case men would not hesitate to pronounce unreasonable and unjust.

This injustice the previous theory escapes, by supposing

<sup>1</sup> Among the former may be mentioned Witsius; among the latter, Pfaff of Tübingen, some of the disciples of Wolf, Baumgarten, and others.

the race, as such, actually to have sinned in Adam, and so justly to be chargeable with the guilt of his transgression. The present theory admits that we did not really participate in his sin, and yet charges upon us the guilt of the transaction, as if we had been a party to the offence. Is this just?

It does not relieve the difficulty to be told, as in the Princeton Repertory, that imputation does not imply *transfer of moral character*, but only *exposure to punishment*; that the race did not really participate in the sin of Adam, nor in the moral ill-desert of that transgression, but only that his sin is laid to our charge, and we are punished for it. Charged with, and punished for, what we are *really* wholly innocent of! No transfer of the sin itself, none of the moral character, or blame-worthiness which attaches to all acts of transgression, since these pertain only to the transgressor himself, and cannot be transferred, but, in place of these, a transfer of the charge and of the punishment. But, does not the punishment belong to the transgressor, and to him only, as really as the sin? Is it a relief to any man's sense of injustice and wrong, to tell him, "we do not really think that you committed that offence, nor do we blame you in the least for any share of yours in the transaction, for we know that you had none; we only *charge* you with it, and *punish* you for it!"

But we shall be told that God is a sovereign, and has a right to make what arrangement he pleases—a right to stake the destinies of the race on the issue of Adam's probation, and, if he falls, to deal with the race as if they had individually fallen—a right to impute his sin to them as if it were theirs, and deal with them accordingly. We reply, God is, indeed, a sovereign, but that gives him no right to act unjustly; no right to punish one man for the sins of another, nor to impute to one man the acts of another. We are not to take refuge behind the throne of divine sovereignty with theories that will not bear the test of calm investigation, and that shock the common feelings of justice

<sup>1</sup> See Article on Imputation, in Princeton Essays, series first, Essay VI.  
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and propriety which Nature has implanted in the human bosom. This doctrine belongs not there. Away with it, and the like of it, from *that* place.

Shall we, then, with others, justify the imputation of Adam's sin to the race, on the supposition that God *presumed* that all his descendants would sin if placed each on trial as Adam was; and so, by an act of *generalization*, dealt with all as with him, on the principle *ex uno disce omnes*. This is the *scientia media* of the schoolmen. But this is a supposition wholly without proof; it is, moreover, a wholly unreasonable and arbitrary mode of procedure which is thus supposed. On the same principle, why not send the race at once to perdition, or to paradise, without individual probation, since to the divine mind it is evident, from eternity, that some will, and others will not, accept the offer of salvation through a redeemer, if the question be submitted to them.

It may be replied, that no objection from the apparent injustice of the procedure can set aside the plain fact, as revealed in scripture, that God *does* impute the sin of Adam to all his posterity. True, we reply; if it be a fact. But *is* it? *Does* the scripture teach this doctrine? If so, we have nothing more to say, but bow in silence to a dispensation which, upon any principles of human reason, we can neither justify nor explain.

But we look in vain for any such teaching. The word "impute," we do, indeed, find in the scriptures, but not in the sense here intended, that of transferring, or setting to the account of another what is not really and properly his own. Not an instance of this can be found. Abraham believes God, and it is imputed to him for righteousness. What is imputed? His faith. Whose faith? His own. Shimei prays David not to impute to him his guilt in cursing the King. *Whose* guilt? His own. On the contrary, do not the scriptures expressly deny any such transfer of guilt from one to another? Do they not, in the strongest and most explicit terms declare that, in the divine administration,

there is, and can be, no such principle of procedure? That "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."<sup>1</sup> The soul that sins, *it*, and *it only*, shall bear the punishment of its sins

But does not God visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation?<sup>2</sup> True, we reply; the children of ungodly parents suffer many evils in consequence of the sins of their ancestry. It is a principle universally true, a grand law, it would seem, of the moral universe, that sin involves the innocent along with the guilty in suffering and calamity. But there is a difference between suffering and punishment. To suffer in consequence of the sin of another, is not to be *punished* for the sin of another. If so, then, we are punished for the sins of our immediate ancestors no less than for the sin of Adam; nay, for theirs much more directly than for his; future generations, in like manner, will be punished for ours.

Should it be replied, that this is really all that is intended by the doctrine of imputation — that the consequences of Adam's sin pass over to his descendants in the shape of manifold suffering and evil, by whatever name we choose to call those consequences, whether calamity or punishment, — we have simply to say, that if this be all that is intended, then, in no proper sense is it sin that is imputed, nor the guilt of sin, nor its punishment; and it is a mere perversion and abuse of language to call it so.

We have dwelt, thus far, upon a single objection to the theory under consideration, the injustice of treating men as if they were guilty of a sin with which they are not in reality chargeable. It is furthermore to be objected to this view of the nature of our connection with the sin of Adam, that it rests upon an assumption, which is at once questionable and objectionable. That assumption is, that Adam

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xviii. 20. Compare Deut. xxiv. 16; see also 2 Kings xiv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. v. 9; Numb. iv. 18.



acted, and was, by special covenant on the part of God, entitled to act, as our federal head and representative in this whole proceeding.

This is the ground-work of the theory. The probation of the race, the grand problem of its destiny was submitted to his decision. He acted for us on trial, sinned for us, fell for us, and his sin becomes thus, in point of *law*, though not in point of *fact*, our sin. He was, in other words, agent for the race in the matter of probation. But this is an assumption which we are not prepared to concede. Upon what evidence does it rest? The advocates of this view speak of a covenant made with Adam to this effect, constituting him our federal head and representative. What, we ask, is that covenant; and where is it? What are its terms? Who are the parties to it? Where was it made? What evidence that any such covenant was ever made by God or man? These are perfectly fair and legitimate questions. We have the right to ask them, and to demand an answer.

Besides, with what propriety could Adam act for us in the manner now supposed? A federal representative is usually supposed to derive his authority from the consent and choice of those whom he represents. But it is a singular and most remarkable feature of this compact, that those most directly interested in it, and who are to be represented in the case, who are to be put on trial, and acquitted or condemned, in the person of their representative, whose eternal destiny depends on the issue of that momentous trial, are not, in fact, parties to the transaction in any sense whatever, not being then in existence. What sort of a compact or federal agreement is that in which the parties chiefly interested have no share? And where is the justice and propriety of such a compact and such a representation? Is it not a gross abuse of terms to speak of Adam as our federal representative, in the sense now intended?

There is a sense, and that a very important one, we are ready to admit, in which men do act for those who come after them. Every man acts for others, no less than for

himself, in whatever he does. The *consequences* of his acts extend to others, and affect them seriously, it may be permanently. Nor can it be otherwise. When the puritan colony set sail from Delfthaven for the shores of the new world, they were acting, not for themselves alone, but for us — for coming generations. When our fathers threw off the yoke of subjection to Great Britain, they acted for those who were to come after them. Thus are we acting in the great struggle of the present hour. In future years, when we are gone and forgotten, those who are to bear our name and inherit our virtues, or our vices, will reap the reward of our present sacrifices and sufferings for the land that we love. So universally; the child of the convicted felon inherits the disgrace of a dishonored name; the drunkard and the profligate bequeath to their children a vitiated sensibility and a disordered constitution. *In this sense* we are *all* the representatives of those who are to be affected by the results of our action. *In this sense* Adam may be said to have represented the whole race, at the head of which he stood. No man ever brought such fearful consequences on such a multitude who came after him, such a train of woes and evils on all coming time. In this sense did he act for the race; in this, and in no other.

As respects this theory, then, while we admit and maintain, that many evils resulting from the sin of Adam pass over to his posterity, not the least of which evils is a corrupt and vitiated moral nature, we cannot admit that in any proper sense his *sin* is transferred to us, or charged to us *as if* it were ours; while we admit that *in some sense* he acted for us, just as all men act for those who come after them, we cannot admit that he was in the proper and legal sense our representative, or that he acted for us in such a sense that his sin becomes by construction our sin, and that we are held in law responsible, and exposed to punishment, for the same.

Rejecting, then, both the views already presented under *a* and *b*, as to the nature of the connection between the

depravity of the race and the sin of the first parent, we have

c. The view which represents that depravity as resulting simply from the laws of natural descent, the child inheriting from the parent a vitiated and corrupt nature, prone to evil, in consequence of which he comes to sin as soon as he comes to moral agency. This nature, derived from Adam through successive generations, is the consequence of his original apostasy. His own nature, which became corrupt by the fall, is transmitted to his posterity, just as like always begets its like. According to this view, we are not constituted sinners by the mere act of Adam sinning, nor by the imputation of his sin to us, nor by any agency of our own, real or imaginary, in that transaction, nor by any compact or covenant made with him in regard to us; but only by our own moral act. We are not constituted sinners until we become sinners, that is, until we sin. Sin we do, however, and that uniformly, because of the corrupt nature thus inherited. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Adam fallen begets a son in his own likeness, and so through successive generations the evil nature extends.

This is the view now generally entertained, we believe, by the New England theologians. It would seem to be the scriptural idea of native depravity, as it certainly is the most reasonable, the most simple and natural idea of it that we can form. The theory is simply this: like father, like son. As to most things we know that this is true. Why may it not be so as to moral nature? If a fondness for particular pursuits and professions, an ear and a taste for music, a propensity to mathematical studies or mechanical employments are, as we know they are, inherited; if the predominance of certain passions and appetites is to be traced to the same source,—if these things and the like descend from parent to child, why may it not be so with that peculiarity of the moral nature which we find to be universal in man, the propensity to evil? Why may not the moral follow the same general law which holds of the mental and the physi-

cal nature? Is not this precisely what we might expect and predict, from the simple observation of the laws of nature in regard to such matters?

II. Our second question now arises: *Is this depravity of our nature in itself culpable?* We have thus far directed our inquiries to the origin of the corruption which we observe in human nature. But what of its morality? Is this innate propensity to evil in itself blameworthy; in itself sin? Our question has reference, be it remembered, to the native disposition, not to human depravity in general, as manifested in the conduct of life; not to voluntary acts or voluntary states of mind, but to that vitiosity of nature itself with which we come into being, and which precedes and lies back of all voluntary acts and states, — is that culpable?

The answer, of course, will depend very much on the reply we make to the preceding question. If we brought this corruption of nature on ourselves by our own voluntary acts in some previous state of being, then it may be culpable. If we brought it on ourselves by personal participation in Adam's transgression, then it is not only *vitium* but *culpa*; it may justly be blamed and justly be punished. If it comes to us by constructive participation in his sin, then, by the same construction, we may be implicated in the guilt and in the punishment of that transgression and of its consequences, of which this is one. On the other hand, if the propensity in question be something which we have in no way, whether directly or indirectly, by personal act or by construction, brought upon ourselves; if it be, for instance, the creation of Deity in the original constitution of our nature, or if it be the natural result of the sins of our ancestors before we were born, in either case, the matter being wholly out of our control, lies also beyond the lines of our responsibility. Our calamity, our misfortune, it may be, but not our guilt. Blame attaches, and can justly attach, only where there is moral agency, and moral agency involves the choices and affections, the voluntary acts and states of mind,

of an intelligent rational being. But the nature with which a man comes into the world precedes all such agency on his part. It is no choice nor act of his, nor the result of any such act or choice; on the contrary, in the present case, it is the result of something which occurred before he had any being,—centuries before he or his immediate ancestry existed. We do not blame a man in other cases for the nature with which he was born. Why should we in this? It may be disagreeable to us: the color of the hair, the color of the eyes, the general cast of complexion and features, the dwarfed or distorted form, extremely disagreeable; but we find no fault with the man on account of these peculiarities. He was so born. It is his misfortune, but not his fault. But is not the same true of the moral as well as of the physical condition and tendencies, in so far as they are strictly native? How can blame attach where there is no responsibility, or responsibility where there is no agency in bringing about the result? In respect to the physical traits that are strictly native, this is universally conceded; wherein does the case really differ as respects the moral traits and tendencies that are also native? Wherein am I really any more responsible for a native tendency to good or evil than for a native tendency to mathematical or musical studies, or for the particular color of the eyes or of the hair? Had I any more agency in producing the one than the other of these peculiarities? and how can I be held responsible for that which I had no agency in producing, and which it is wholly out of my power to prevent? A defect it may be, and that a very serious one; but am I to blame for that defect?

But, reply the Princeton divines, sin is sin; however it originates. If a man is good, he is good; if bad, he is bad, no matter how he became so. But it seems to us that it does matter how he became so, and that very materially. Otherwise, suppose that Deity himself, according to the supposition first made, did, by direct creative act, endow man with a disposition to evil; and suppose him then to

charge that disposition to man as his own fault, and to punish him for having it. Does it make no difference now, how the man comes by that disposition? Would he not say: "It is hard, and seems unjust, to be punished simply for being what you made me"? Would it be sufficient and satisfactory for Deity to reply: "True, it seems hard, but then sin is sin, good is good, and evil is evil, wherever found, no matter how they originated! I must deal with facts as they are, without inquiring how they came to be so."

Suppose by some statute, human or divine, all men were required to have black hair and blue eyes, and that by some misfortune it happened to one of the aforesaid divines to be otherwise provided. The fact is patent, and the logic is irresistible: he is a violator of the statute, and must pay the penalty. "But it is not my fault," replies the culprit; "I was so born; I had no agency or choice in the matter." "True," replies the judge, "but I have read in your own writings that good is good, and bad is bad, no matter how they came to be so; and surely it is true that red hair is red hair whatever its origin. Is it not a tenet of your own philosophy that even the native dispositions and tendencies are culpable"? To which, of course, the theologian can only reply: "Verily it is so."

The question to be considered is not whether sin is sin, wherever found, nor yet whether all sin is blameworthy and to be punished, but whether the native tendency to evil in man is sin. To this the common sense of mankind, when fairly questioned and allowed to give true answer, makes but one reply. It recognizes nothing as truly and properly culpable which it is not in the power of man to avoid. It attaches blame only where there is responsibility, and responsibility only where there is some agency in bringing about the result. If a man bring upon himself, by his own vicious conduct, a tendency to insanity or disease, men say he is responsible for that result. If he transmits that tendency to his children, they lay the blame of the disordered constitution which those children inherit, not upon the chil-

dren themselves, but upon the parent who contracted and transmitted the evil. If a man, by carelessness or design, put out his own eyes, men say he is to blame and must suffer the consequences of his own carelessness and folly. If he is born blind he is never charged with it as any fault of his own.

But it may be asked: is not a tendency to sin a sinful tendency? Sinful, we reply, in one sense, but not in the sense intended in the question; sinful in the sense of leading to sin, not in the sense of being itself sin. The expression is ambiguous. But is not a disposition or tendency to sin, itself sin? How can it be so? we reply. Is a constitutional tendency to blindness or insanity, itself blindness or insanity? Is a predisposition to decay and death, itself decay and death? Is the tendency of a chimney to smoke, itself smoke? Yet we call the chimney smokey, and so we call the disposition sinful, meaning, in either case, that the tendency is in that direction.

But it amounts to the same thing in the end, it may be said, whether men come into the world already sinful, or with a disposition that is sure to lead to sin; in either case, sin is the result. It makes just this difference, we reply: in the one case the man is a sinner by no agency and through no fault of his own; in the other case he is a sinner from choice, and by his own act. It is precisely the difference between a responsible agent and an irresponsible passive recipient; between a voluntary doer and an involuntary sufferer. As regards the responsibility of man, it is the difference between something and nothing; as regards the justice of the divine character, it is the difference between noon and midnight.

The view which we are maintaining would seem to be the most simple and obvious one—that which would commend itself to the reason and good sense of men. It is not, however, it must frankly be confessed, the view which has most widely prevailed among theologians. It was held by Zuingli among the reformers, and by Jeremy Taylor in the English church. It is the doctrine of the New Haven divines, and indeed of the New England theologians gen-

erally, at the present day, as well as of the New school portion of the Presbyterian church. The older and stricter Calvinists have uniformly maintained the opposite. Calvin himself holds that our corrupt nature is sin, because the seed of sin, and therefore odious to God and sinful in his sight; and that infants may justly be punished for it, irrespective of actual transgression.<sup>1</sup>

The Helvetic and French confessions make our corrupt nature to be hereditary sin; and the latter even goes so far as to pronounce it deserving of eternal death in infants yet unborn. The Augsburg confession takes essentially the same view, regarding native corruption as inherent sin. Such is the view of the Lutheran and Reformed churches, in their various branches. The Thirty-nine Articles of the church of England make original sin the fault of the nature of every man by descent from Adam, and deserving damnation as such. The Princeton divines and the Old school theologians generally, of this country, regard our native corruption as itself sin. This inherent sin they hold to be the penalty for our sin in Adam, as our federal head and representative. Sin is thus made the punishment of sin. We are, in the first place, charged with a sin which we never committed, and for that sin we are punished by inheriting a depraved nature. But, further, that depravity is itself a sin, deserving eternal punishment. So that we are to be punished for being punished! Our sin is punishment, and our punishment is a further sin!

If we inquire for the opinions of the Greek and Latin fathers on this subject, we find no traces of the doctrine that our native depravity is itself sin previous to the time of Augustine. He was the very first to apply to this native bias or propensity to sin the terms *peccatum originale*. Previously Tertullian had been careful to designate it, not as *peccatum*, but as *vitium* and *malum*: "*malum animae ex originis vitio*,"<sup>2</sup> he denominates it in one passage; and Am-

<sup>1</sup> See Institutes, II. 1. 8; also Commentary on Rom. v. 12.

<sup>2</sup> De Anima, c. 41



brose calls it *contagium*: "antequam nascimur, *maculamur contagio*."<sup>1</sup> The term *peccatum* indeed admits of this sense as well as of the other; it may be either *malum* or *culpa*; but as employed by Augustine it is taken in the stricter sense. After him it gradually found its way into the language of councils and of the Western church, not however without frequent dissent and protest. The distinction which, in the fifth century, began to be made between "*peccatum originale*" and "*peccata actualia*," indicates a disposition to discriminate more clearly than Augustine had done in his use of the term. Later still, the schoolmen, accustomed to greater precision in the use of terms, preferred the more accurate expression of Tertullian, *vitium naturale*.

The position of Dr. Woods, late of Andover, in respect to this matter, is somewhat anomalous. In common with the theologians of the earlier school, he holds that there is in man "a wrong disposition, or a corrupt nature, which is antecedent to any sinful emotions, and from which, as an inward source, all sinful emotions and actions proceed,"<sup>2</sup> and that this disposition, or nature, is itself *morally wrong and sinful*. This he labors at considerable length to show. He goes further, and raises the question, "whether it may not be, partly at least, on account of this *degenerate nature* of Adam's posterity, that God speaks of them, and in his government treats them, as *sinner*s, from the very beginning of their personal existence, and previously to any actual transgression."<sup>3</sup> This opinion he speaks of as one which has generally been maintained by evangelical writers, particularly Dr. Dwight, in his *System of Theology*, and thinks it *may be the true opinion*. "In our very *nature*, in the state of our minds from the beginning of our existence, God may

<sup>1</sup> Apol. David, c. 11; so also Cyprian, who in one place speaks of an infant as having committed no sin at all, but only inherited a depraved disposition from Adam — "contracted contagion." Tertullian expressly calls children whose depraved disposition is not yet developed in action, "*innocent*"; and Clement of Alexandria says: "David, though begotten in sin, was not himself in sin, nor was himself *sin*."

<sup>2</sup> Works, Vol. II. p. 328.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* II. 326.

see a moral contamination, a corrupt propensity, which, connected as it is with the first offence of Adam, renders it, in his infallible judgment, just and right for him to treat us as sinners. May it not be," he asks, "that infants suffer and die on this account as well as on account of the one offence of Adam?" Yet he subsequently advances the opinion, as one which substantially unites the two conflicting theories, and which will, he thinks, be most likely in the end to be generally adopted, that the *disposition*, whatever it may be, is never really regarded and treated as exclusive of action. "What I mean is, that there is no such thing as a moral being who is actually treated as a subject of retribution while his moral nature is not in some way developed in holy or unholy action."<sup>1</sup> "While any one exists, and continues to exist, with a disposition or propensity which has not in any way been manifested by action, how can he be treated as a subject of retribution. Though his disposition is wrong (wrong as a disposition), he must ultimately be treated according to his actions, they being the true expression of his disposition."<sup>2</sup>

So we should say. But what then becomes of the proposition, that because of this disposition, prior to all acts of transgression, God may treat infants as sinners, and they suffer and die on this account? The two positions are manifestly and utterly at variance.

Dr. Woods strongly disclaims the idea that infants will be condemned to future misery merely because of native depravity. "I am not aware that any intelligent Christian can be found," he says, "who maintains the unauthorized and appalling position that infant children, who are not guilty of any actual sin, either outwardly or inwardly, will be doomed to misery in the world to come."<sup>3</sup> But *why not*, if the native disposition is itself sin, morally wrong *per se*, "the essence of moral evil," "the sum of all that is vile and hateful;" why may it not be punished, and that justly?

<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. II. p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* II. 342.

<sup>3</sup> Works, Vol. II. p. 341.

Moreover, if infants actually do suffer and die, *as sinners*, because of this *nature* merely, though not as yet developed in moral action; if their sufferings and death are the actual punishment of that *inherent sin*, as the earlier writers maintain, and as Dr. Woods thinks may be the case, how do we know that they may not be punished also hereafter for the same offence? If their native disposition is such a sin as justly to bring upon them the greatest suffering and penalty in this world, may it not possibly reach over to the future, and involve them in like judgments there? An "appalling position" it may well be called, but not more appalling than the premise of which it is the logical consequence, that an inherent disposition or tendency to sin, though not as yet developed in action, is itself sin. If so, then it may be justly treated as such. Calvin was logically consistent in holding the doctrine and accepting the conclusion; Dr. Woods logically inconsistent in accepting the doctrine and rejecting the conclusion.

Nor is Dr. Woods more fortunate in his facts than in his logic. He does not seem to be aware that any one holds, or has ever held, this appalling doctrine. In the passage last cited, he thinks no "intelligent Christian can be found who maintains" the future misery of infants who have not committed actual sin. And, in his earlier letters to Unitarians, he holds the following language: "On this particular point our opinions have been often misrepresented. We are said to hold that God dooms a whole race of innocent creatures to destruction, or considers them all deserving of destruction, for the sin of one man. Now, when I examine the writings of the earlier Calvinists generally, on the subject of original sin, I find nothing which resembles such a statement as this."<sup>1</sup> Exceptionable language, he admits, may have been used in some cases, and erroneous opinions have sometimes been entertained, "but the orthodox in New England at the present day," he thinks, "are not chargeable with the same fault." Probably not; for they are not

<sup>1</sup> Letters to Unitarians, page 31, original edition.

chargeable with opinions which would naturally and logically lead to such a conclusion. They do not believe that a native tendency, not yet developed in action, is itself sin, and therefore deserves to be treated as such. They do not hold that the sin of Adam is, by imputation or otherwise, in any proper sense, the sin of his posterity, so that they may justly be punished for it. But what shall we say of the creeds and confessions already referred to, which do teach, at once, these doctrines, and their logical consequence? What of Calvin, himself, as already cited, to the effect that infants may justly be punished for the depravity of nature, irrespective of actual sin? What of the Helvetic Confession, which pronounces the depraved nature to be sin, and *deserving of damnation, even in infants yet unborn?* What of the Thirty-nine Articles, which make original sin the fault of the nature of every man by descent from Adam, and *deserving damnation* as such? What of the Augsburg Confession, which takes essentially the same ground, including imputed along with inherent sin? What of Dr. Hodge and the Princeton divines, who take the same ground? In fine, what shall we say of such distinguished writers as Abelard and Pascal, who go further than Calvin, and hold, not merely that God justly may, but actually does, condemn to endless misery beings not guilty of actual transgression?

We have considered, in the previous pages, the relation of sin to the nature of man. It remains to discuss *its relation to the will and purpose of God.*

Account for it as we may, or account for it not at all, the fact remains evident and indisputable. Sin does exist in our world. It is here, and it is here in some way by divine permission. It is here, and God has not prevented its being here. But why not? Here is the enigma. Looking at the omnipotence of God, we are ready to say he can prevent it if he will. Looking at his benevolence and holiness, we are ready to say, he will prevent it if he can. Yet he has not done so.

Various methods of explanation have been attempted by those who have sought to solve this enigma. Two suppositions, however, and only two, are logically possible; into one or the other of which all the suppositions and theories on the subject virtually resolve themselves. These are :

A. *That God cannot entirely prevent sin.*

B. *That for some reason, he does not choose to prevent it.*

As each of these propositions supposes what the other denies, — A, that God chooses to prevent all sin, but cannot; B, that he can, but chooses not, — they are virtually contradictory of each other; and, as such, by the laws of contradiction, and of excluded middle, while they cannot both be true, one or the other must be.

Each, again, may be presented under diverse forms. We may say that God cannot prevent all sin, *a.* in *any* system, *b.* in a *moral* system. Or, if we adopt the other theory, we may hold that God does not choose to prevent sin; *a.* because its existence is in itself desirable; or *b.* because, though not in itself desirable, it is still the necessary means of the greatest good; or *c.* because, though not in itself tending to good, it may be overruled to that result; or *d.* because, in general terms, its permission will involve less evil than its absolute prevention.

Taking the first theory in its first form we have this statement :

A. *God cannot prevent all sin* — *a.* in any system. This is possible, supposable, but not probable. His omnipotence is thus essentially surrendered. If he cannot prevent sin in any system which can be devised, if it is not in his power, in other words, to construct a system from which all sin shall be effectually excluded, then there is a manifest and essential limit to his power. This may be. But what evidence that it is so? What reason to suppose that the entire prevention of sin is a matter wholly beyond the sphere of the divine power? Might he not have given man a nature, for example, that would wholly have precluded sin? Or, endowing him with the present nature and mental constitu-

tion, might he not have kept temptation out of his way, and surrounded him with influences that would certainly have ensured his obedience? True, that would not be the *present* system, but it would be *a* system. Do we know that God could not have done this?

The question is not now whether such a system would be the best — whether it would be a wise and expedient method, or the reverse; but whether it might not be a possible thing; whether we know that it would not be possible. The theory under consideration is positive upon this point. The burden of proof rests on those who maintain such a position. In the absence of proof to the contrary, we have a right to infer that the power of God, which we find to be unlimited in other respects, is also unlimited in the matter of the prevention of sin; that he might, if he had chosen, have instituted a system from which moral evil should be wholly excluded.

As stated in its second form, the theory is, that God cannot prevent all sin, *b.* in a *moral* system. Such is the nature, it is supposed, of moral agency, that, under all influences which may be brought to bear upon him, the free agent may still sin, and God cannot prevent it but by destroying his freedom. But can this be proved? Doubtless, in a moral system, it must be in the *power* of the agent to sin if he chooses. But that is not the point. The question is not whether he *can* sin if he pleases, but whether he certainly *will* sin in spite of all influences to the contrary. Whether it is impossible for God to prevent his sinning without taking away his freedom. Of this it seems to us there is no proof. We do not see that there is anything in the nature of moral agency, or a moral system, to forbid the supposition that God, while leaving the power to sin complete in the free agent, may still secure the certainty of an opposite result. Is not the certainty of a given course of action perfectly compatible with power to the contrary? Such, at all events, is the philosophy of those who hold this theory. To say that man may sin, then, because he is a

free agent, does not prove that God cannot prevent him from actually sinning, and still leave him a free agent. The power to sin, and the exercise of that power, are two different things, and the one may exist without the other — the former without the latter.

What evidence, then, that God cannot prevent sin in a moral system? That he *has* not prevented it does not prove that he *can* not. There may be other reasons for his not preventing it besides the want of power to do so.

The supposition that God is unable to keep sin out of a moral system is, to say the least, an improbable one. He can do so many things, that it is certainly fair to presume, in the absence of positive evidence to the contrary, that he can govern moral agents. It is not probable that he would create a system which he could not control, a system which, when created, must be at once abandoned to moral ruin, or else destroyed. The wisdom of instituting a system, the working of which, in so essential a point, should be beyond his control, would be more than questionable.

Nor does the supposition fully and fairly meet the question before us. Why does God permit sin, we ask? Because he cannot prevent it in a *certain kind* of a system, viz. a *moral* one, is the reply. Very well; then why not adopt some other? Is he shut up to this alone of all possible systems? To reply that a moral system with sin is better than any other system without sin, is to change the ground. It is, then, after all, not from want of power to prevent it, but simply as a matter of expediency, that sin is permitted. The debate shifts at once to the second of the two leading theories.

Furthermore, if sin cannot be prevented in a moral system, then it cannot be prevented in any system. For, what is sin? Is it not something pertaining exclusively to moral beings, and so to a moral system? Is sin possible except under a moral system? If so, then, to say that God cannot prevent it in a moral system, is to say that he cannot prevent it at all. If he can prevent sin, then he can prevent it

under the only circumstances in which it can possibly occur, viz. in a moral system.

And why not, we ask again; why may not sin be prevented in a moral system? What is the insuperable obstacle? The theory rests on some supposed inability on the part of God to influence the choices of free moral agents so as to secure given results. But of this there is no evidence. Nay, there is abundant evidence to the contrary? It is not true that God cannot influence the choices, and so control the moral conduct of free agents. He can do this. He does it. He kept the holy angels. He keeps good men every day from falling. When the heart of man is renewed by divine grace, when the soul of the believer is purified and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, are not the choices of the man influenced, and is not his conduct controlled by the power that worketh in him, both to will and to do, according to his good pleasure? And is the man the less a free agent because of this influence? Whenever we pray for divine guidance and direction, for the renewing and purifying influences of the Spirit, when we ask to be made better, to be kept from sin, to be lead in the way of life, are we not, in fact, asking to be influenced and controlled as to our moral conduct? All such prayer proceeds on the supposition that the moral choices of man are not beyond the reach and control of Deity. If God can keep the believer from falling into temptation and sin, he could have kept Adam in like manner.

But it may be replied, that while it is possible for God to prevent sin in any particular instance, as in the case of Adam, for example, it might not be possible for him to prevent it entirely. If repressed in one place, it may break out in another. Of this, however, there is no evidence. We do not know that Deity is reduced to any such alternative, having only the choice of time and place, but compelled to admit the incursion of moral evil at some point into his dominions. From the fact that he can and does prevent sin in particular cases, it is fair to presume that he can pre-



vent it in other cases, and in all, if he sees fit. There is no evidence that sin is a necessity of a moral system.

The most that could reasonably be maintained is, that it *may be* that God cannot entirely prevent sin in a moral system. This is the form in which the matter is stated by Dr. Taylor, of New Haven.

This, however, does not furnish an explicit answer to the question before us. We ask why God permits sin? To say, *it may be* he could not prevent it in a moral system, does not answer our inquiry, since it is equally true that *it may be* he *could* prevent it. If it cannot be proved that he can, it is equally difficult to prove that he cannot. It is virtually a confession of ignorance, an admission that we do not know.

Now, this may be the best we can do, and all we can do. A positive answer may be out of the power of mortals. Still, when our answer must be conjectural, there may still be a choice of conjectures. Other suppositions there may be with equal, or even greater, probabilities in their favor. It is not enough, then, to say, *it may be* God could not prevent sin in a moral system, and assign that as an answer to the question before us, without first inquiring what reason there is to think that he could not, and whether there is not more reason for thinking that the true answer may lie in another direction. As in reply to the objection against the divine benevolence, which is the use Dr. Taylor makes of it, the statement may suffice. To meet that objection it may be enough to say, we do not know that God *could* have prevented sin in a moral system. The burden of proof then falls on the objector. But, in answer to the general question before us, something more explicit is needed than a merely negative and conjectural statement. We ask evidence. We ask wherein this conjecture, or possibility, is preferable to any one of the many other possible solutions — wherein it is more likely to be the true one than they?

Dr. Taylor argues, that because a moral being has the *power* to sin, under whatever influences exerted upon him,

therefore it *may be* that he *will* sin ; in other words, it may be impossible for God to prevent him.<sup>1</sup> But this does not follow. May there not be a power to sin, and yet a certainty not to sin ? Is it not thus with the holy angels, and with the redeemed in heaven ? Have not good men on earth the power to do many things which it is quite certain they will not do, if they are led by the Spirit of God, and kept by divine grace ? Do not the sanctifying influences of the Spirit make the final salvation of the true believer a certain future event, while, at the same time, as all the warnings of scripture imply, it is possible for him to fall away and perish ? Nay, so far as power is concerned, has not God himself full power to do evil if he chooses ; while it is absolutely certain that he will always prefer to do the right ? On any other supposition, what becomes of the virtue or rectitude of the divine character ? When to any moral being it is no longer a matter of choice, but of simple necessity, what his conduct shall be, when he has no power to do other than he does, where lies the morality of his action, and what credit properly pertains to him for virtue and rectitude ? But if there may be the power of sinning, and yet the certainty not to sin, then the prevention of sin is not incompatible with the requisitions of a moral system. It does not follow that a moral being *will* sin because he *can* ; or that there is no way of preventing a given moral act but by rendering that act impossible. When God keeps a good man from some form of transgression, into which he might otherwise fall, he does it by influences bearing upon the choice, and not by taking away from the man the power of sinning. When he keeps Peter or Paul from utter apostasy, he does it not by depriving them of the power of falling away. But if men may be prevented from actually sinning while still having the power to sin, then it is not out of the power of God to prevent sin in a moral system.

Whether it would be, on the whole, better to prevent it, in other words, whether it could be prevented in the *best*

<sup>1</sup> See Lectures on Moral Government, Vol. I. Lect. VIII. IX.

system, may still admit of question. This point Dr. Taylor proceeds to discuss in his second argument, assuming the position that it may be God cannot prevent all sin in the *best* moral system. This is equivalent, however, to saying that he does not *choose* to prevent it, and finds its place, therefore, properly under our second general theory. The supposition now is that God chooses the best system; and, as sin is incidental to that system, he chooses to permit the sin rather than adopt another system. In other words, he regards its permission as involving less evil than would result from its absolute prevention. This proposition will be considered in its place.

Since it cannot be shown that God cannot prevent sin, we must seek the solution of our problem in the other direction.

B. *For some reason he did not choose to prevent it.*

a. Inasmuch as its existence is in itself desirable. This, however, can hardly be. Sin is never, *per se*, a desirable thing, but always hateful, and that only. God can have seen in it, in itself considered, nothing to recommend it. Otherwise, if it were a thing to be for any reason desired, and preferred to holiness in its place, God could no longer properly hate it nor consistently forbid it. The supposition, therefore, that God did not choose to prevent sin because its existence is in itself desirable, while logically possible, is morally impossible, and may be dismissed without further comment.

b. Inasmuch as it is the *necessary means of the greatest good*. This is supposable. It is quite possible that sin, while not in itself desirable, may still be the means of good; possible, even, that it may be the avenue by which the greatest good can be most directly reached; possible that in no other way could God accomplish so much good to the universe as by the permission of sin in it. Such is the theory; and it has seemed to a large class of minds, eminent for wisdom and piety, to be the most satisfactory solution of our problem. Thoroughly convinced of the benevolence of

God, and still met on every side with the palpable and gloomy fact of sin, it has seemed to them that somehow this fact must be no exception to the sublime rule of the divine benevolence; that somehow the goodness of God was at work, in and through this very gloom and darkness of sin, to bring about results of beneficence not otherwise attained. And, indeed, so much as this we must admit, or abandon the problem as a hopeless task. Doubtless the benevolence of God is somehow concerned in the permission of sin; somehow at work to bring about the best results from that permission. The question is *how*? whether directly, through the instrumentality of sin as a direct means of good, and a more efficient means than any other; or indirectly, and in some other way. Is sin, *per se*, the means of good? Is it the means of greatest good? Is it the necessary means of greatest good? These questions must be answered in the affirmative by the advocates of this theory; but on what grounds these answers can be maintained it is difficult to perceive. How can it be shown that sin has any tendency whatever to good? Are not all its tendencies evil, and toward evil? Left to its own natural working would it ever result in good? If not in good, how in the greatest good; and how is it not only the means, but the necessary means, of that greatest good?

Moreover, if it be, as now affirmed, the necessary means of greatest good, then is not God bound, as a benevolent being, not only to permit, but even to encourage, nay, to require and demand it? at all events, not to forbid it? But he does forbid it, and require holiness in its place. According to the theory, he requires what is really not for the best good of the universe, and forbids what is really the most direct and efficient means of good to the greatest number. What shall we say of his benevolence in making such a requisition; or of his wisdom, in contriving such an awkward and back-handed a system?

This theory, closely examined, differs not essentially from the preceding; since if sin is in reality the direct and neces-

sary means of the highest good, it is impossible to show why it is not in reality a thing to be desired, and to be more desired than anything else in its place. The greatest good is always a proper object of desire; and if we may rightfully desire any given end, we may also rightfully desire the means necessary to the attainment of that end.

c. Inasmuch as it can be over-ruled to good. God permits sin for the sake of over-ruling it, and bringing good out of it. It is a mark of wisdom to be able to turn a disadvantage to an advantage, and out of apparent defeat to organize ultimate and real victory. God shows his wisdom and power in baffling all the designs of Satan, and making even the malignant forces of evil march in the van of his own sublime purposes.

This may be so. But is it wisdom to introduce, or suffer to be introduced, a difficulty for the sake of overcoming it, a disease for the sake of checking it, a rebellion for the sake of subduing it? It is wise and well to heal the disorder; but would it not have been wiser and better to have prevented it? It is well and wise to put the fire out; but is it wise to set the house on fire for the sake of putting it out? What shall we say of the military leader who purposely allows defeat and disaster to overtake him in order to show how well he can remedy the evil; or of a physician who introduces a dangerous and fatal disease for the sake of showing his skill in subduing it?

But God shows his glory in meeting and overcoming the fearful evils which sin inflicts. True, but he does not show his glory in admitting sin for the sake of showing his glory. It would be a questionable mercy that should suffer some great calamity to occur, as war or pestilence, for the sake of showing mercy to the sick and wounded. Which is the truer benevolence, to keep a man from falling into the water, or to suffer him to fall in for the purpose of showing our compassion and our skill in rescuing him?

The theory under consideration becomes logically defensible only when we suppose the evil to be overruled, not

merely to good, but to greater good than would have been otherwise attainable. If the defeat of to-day tends to a victory to-morrow which shall more than compensate for the present disaster; if the disorder which prostrates the sick man can be not only healed, but so healed as to leave him a stronger and healthier man than he was before, or ever would have been but for the disease,—then the case assumes a new aspect. Thus modified, however, the theory virtually passes over into that last discussed. The sin, it is now affirmed, is permitted because in no other way can results so desirable, be attained as from admitting and then overruling it. In other words, its admission and subsequent overruling are the necessary means of the greatest good. It would be incumbent on the advocate of the theory, as thus modified, to show that greater benefits accrue to the universe from what has been done to counteract sin, and turn it from its proper purpose, and its legitimate results, than would have accrued from its absolute prevention; or, to revert to the figure already employed, that the patient is absolutely better for having had the disease. This is certainly supposable, but a proposition not easily to be established; nor do we perceive how, in case such a position could be maintained, it would be possible to avoid the conclusion that sin is really a thing to be thankful for, as being the occasion of the highest good, even as the patient has reason to be thankful for the disorder which has resulted in his improved condition. True, it is not the disorder itself, but the remedies used to counteract it, which have wrought the improvement. Still, as those remedies would not have been employed but for the disease, the patient is really indebted to the latter as the occasion of his receiving the benefit, and in one sense the cause of it.

*d.* Inasmuch as its permission, under the present checks and counteractions, will involve less evil than its absolute prevention; in other words, because he saw that, all things considered, it was better to permit sin, under its present restrictions, than to do more than he is doing to prevent it.

Not that it would be impossible to prevent it ; but that the system or plan which should absolutely exclude it would not, on the whole, be so good a plan as the present one. Why, or in what respect it would not be as good ; wherein the measures necessary for the entire exclusion of sin might be the occasion of more evil than its admission under present limitations, the theory does not undertake to decide. The statement is general rather than specific. We do not know, and therefore we do not say, according to this hypothesis, precisely what the reason is that sin cannot be absolutely prevented without, on the whole, doing more harm than is done by its present permission. Whether the difficulty lies in some peculiarity of moral agency, or a moral system, rendering it unwise to modify essentially the present method of dealing with the evil, or whether it lies in some other direction, we do not know. Enough that to the divine mind some such reason does appear. Enough that, all things considered, he perceives it to be not for the best, to do more than he is doing to prevent sin. Enough that such a supposition is possible and is reasonable. More definite than this we need not be, and cannot be with any certainty. So much as this, at least, we must maintain in order to vindicate the divine wisdom and goodness.

We see enough of God's holiness and hatred of sin to warrant the conclusion that he would prevent it if he could do so consistently and wisely ; if, in other words, it would be for the best to do so. The fact that he has not prevented it, is *prima facie* evidence that it would not be for the best ; that he could not in that way secure the best results. Of his wisdom, his holiness, his goodness, we have positive and sufficient evidence ; we have, on the other hand, no evidence that the entire prevention of sin would have been attended with better results, all things taken into the account, than its permission under all the checks and safeguards of the present system. We do not know that it would have been wise and good to have done more than he has done to prevent it. That being the case, the holiness

and benevolence of Deity stand fully vindicated, and the question, why is sin permitted by a good and wise and holy God, is answered so far as it is possible for man to answer it in his present state of being.

Is sin, then, for the best? No; but the non-prevention of sin may be for the best. It is not sin, but the purpose on the part of God not to do more than he is doing to prevent sin, that is for the best. It is the peculiarity of the present theory that it presents sin, not as a good, nor as the means of good, much less the necessary means of good; but rather as an evil, and that wholly and continually; while at the same time it supposes that there may be a greater evil than the present amount of sin under the conditions of the present system. It puts the existence of sin, not in the light of a greater good, but only of a lesser evil. Is not that the true aspect in which to view it? It supposes it quite possible that to place man under the influences of a moral system, with freedom of action, exposure to temptation, motives to obedience, with all the safeguards that are thrown around him in the shape of precept, warning, and persuasion, such and so many, but no more, may be better than either to change the system entirely, or even to multiply the motives to right action. Who will say that this may not be so?

Does God, then, prefer sin to holiness, all things considered? By no means. He hates sin, looks upon it never with complacency, prefers it never to holiness. It is not good; nor is it a means of good. But he prefers to suffer it, rather than to make such changes in the whole system of things as might be necessary in order to keep sin entirely out. He does not prefer sin to holiness; but he prefers the lesser of two evils: sin under the present system, to what might be in its place. He does not prefer tares to wheat in his field. But he prefers the present status of wheat along with tares, rather than a condition of things in which there should be no tares and no wheat, or even no tares and less wheat.

But here we shall be told that God is not limited, in his



operations, to a choice of evils. His method is perfect. It would not be perfect, if it took sin into the account, as part of the general system. Sin is not of God. This is the position taken by Professor Squier in his work entitled "The Problem Solved." The attempt is made to rule out the fact of sin from the system of divine government, as something in no way pertaining to the divine method or purpose; not included in his plan, something which has forced itself in from without, and for which God is no way responsible. To this we reply, sin is in the system, and the question is: how came it here? It is here, a great portentous fact, not to be ruled out or ignored by any artifice. It is here, and must come in, in some sense, by divine permission. Its coming in must have been foreseen by the omniscient ruler, and taken into the account. And now the question is: why was this foreseen approaching evil allowed to introduce itself into God's perfect system? This is the real question; and it is virtually, not to say studiously, ignored by Professor Squier. One of three things he must say in answer to this question. Either its coming was unforeseen on the part of God; or, foreseeing, he was unable to prevent it; or, for reasons relating to the general good, he did not choose to prevent it. If unforeseen, the fault lies with the divine omniscience. A wise prudence or sagacity should have kept better guard over the new creation. If, foreseeing the coming evil, he was unable to prevent it, his omnipotence is at fault; and we have now the spectacle of the Supreme Being standing at the door of his new world, besom in hand, vainly striving to keep out the inrushing tide. If for wise reasons he does not choose to exclude the evil, then he permits it. The latter is the only really tenable position.

To this Professor Squier himself must ultimately be driven; since he must admit that it was at least in God's power to keep out sin by not creating moral beings; and that he can at any moment put an end to it, if in no other way, by destroying the system. He must admit that when God

chose to create such beings, he did it with the full knowledge that they would sin. It was for him to decide whether a race of moral beings who would certainly sin, should exist or not; that is, whether sin should exist or not; and he decided that question in the affirmative.

It avails nothing now to say, with Professor Squier, that sin is not of God; that his plan does not embrace it, nor his eternal purpose take it in; that his way is perfect, and can have nothing to do with evil in any form. Here are the facts. The question: is why is sin allowed to break in from without into the divine system? Why is such an inroad permitted? This is the real problem; and with all deference to the title of the work, we beg leave to say that this little problem is not solved by the statements of Professor Squier. It is not even touched by him. As against the position that God is the originator and author of sin, that he purposes it in the sense of contriving, procuring, becoming the efficient cause of it, the reasoning of Professor Squier is perfectly valid; and this would seem to have been the shape in which the matter lay before his mind. But that is not the question really at issue; nor is such the position of those who maintain the divine permission of sin.

To return to the theory under discussion. The difference between the theory now stated, and the doctrine that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, may be thus illustrated. Among the elementary ingredients of the air which we breathe is a certain gas, deleterious, nay fatal to human lungs, if inhaled by itself, which nevertheless in combination with other elements becomes useful, insomuch that the air is positively better with it than without it. It is there, not because God could not have created an atmosphere into which it should not enter, but it is there as essential to the best atmosphere. It is the necessary means of the greatest good. What nitrogen is to the atmosphere, such is sin to the general system of the universe.

But, says the objector, if this is so, how is it that God

hates this nitrogen, and pronounces it bad, and only bad, and forbids most absolutely all creatures to breathe it, or to breathe anything into which it enters, or to have anything whatever to do with it, except to shun and abhor it? Hardly consistent, this!

In place of such a theory he would prefer the following: Here is a block of marble, perfect in color, and fineness, and form, suitable every way for the purposes of the artist, save that, in one place, a stain has stricken through it, marring its otherwise snowy whiteness. This stain is, in truth, a serious defect. The marble were much better without it. To remove it, however, might be productive of greater injury to the marble than to suffer it to remain. On the whole, I choose this block as it is—choose it even in preference to other blocks that are without the stain, as on the whole superior to the others—choose it notwithstanding the defect, and in spite of it, not for the sake of it, nor for any good the stain will do, not to show my skill in removing it, not because I prefer the stain, in itself considered, to the absence of the same, but simply because, all things considered, this block, defective as it is, is better than any other which is presented to my choice. Sin is that stain on the best system; admitted, not for its own sake, and not as means of good, but for the sake of the system to which it pertains; suffered to remain because the means necessary to its extirpation might be productive of a greater evil in its stead.

But this, it will be said, limits the power of God. In a sense it does, and so do all theories which can be offered—this no more than the others. If we say that God could not have prevented sin in any system, or in any moral system, we directly limit his power. If we say he admits it for the sake of overruling it to greater good, we go on the supposition that he cannot secure that greater good as directly and as well in any other way. If we say it is the necessary means of the greatest good, the very term “necessary” sets a limit, at once and positively, to the divine

power. We no longer imply, but affirm, that it is out of the power of God to reach the proposed end by any other method. In fine, proceed as we will, we come upon essentially the same ground. On any theory there is this limitation, at least, that in the nature of things some methods of procedure, and some systems, are preferable to others, even for the Deity; that he can accomplish better results by certain means and methods, than by others — by the present system, for example, than by one from which sin should be wholly excluded. At least all theories under B stand upon this as essentially their common ground, and no one of them has a right to charge the other with limiting the divine power, while itself stands equally exposed to the same charge. As between the general theories A and B, there is indeed this difference, that the former regards the prevention of sin as beyond the power of God, and so directly limits his omnipotence; while the latter only supposes it out of his power to prevent sin and still secure the best results. But as between the several specific theories under B there is no such difference. To say that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, just as really imposes a limit to the divine method of operation, as to say that the permission of sin involves on the whole less evil than would result from its absolute prevention. The difference is, that in the one case the advantage of the system is attributed directly to sin itself, as the means of good, in the other it is an advantage attained in spite of sin. In the one case the introduction of sin is viewed as a positive good, in the other only as the lesser of evils. In either case the prevention of sin is supposed to be in the power of God, but not to be on the whole for the best. Each supposes that in the nature of things some methods are preferable to others. So far as this, and no farther, does either limit the power of God. To say that the permission of sin may involve less evil than its absolute prevention, and on this account God did not choose to prevent it, is the same thing as to say that he cannot prevent sin in the best system. But we do not

understand it to be the prerogative of Omnipotence to render all methods and measures equally advantageous. Even to Omnipotence there may and must still be a choice.

And here it may be asked : is God, then, less happy because sin is in the world ? If its admission is merely a choice of evils, as now represented ; if he permits it not as an instrument of good, but merely as the occasion of less harm than would result from its entire exclusion, then it may well be that sin, though suffered to exist, is still an object of displeasure and abhorrence to the divine mind. Its existence, therefore, so far from contributing to his happiness, can only detract from it. Indeed, how can it be otherwise ? Every act of disobedience on the part of the subject must necessarily be displeasing, in the highest degree, to the infinitely pure and holy God. And is he not less happy when displeased, than when pleased ?

This seems to place the happiness of God in the hand of the sinner. It puts it in the power of any moral being to add to or detract from the sum total of the divine happiness, according as he shall choose to obey or disobey the divine precepts. This is indeed a tremendous power. We may well shrink from a conclusion so fearful. But is it not, after all, an inevitable result of all moral agency ? Is it not a power which Deity confers on all his creatures when he makes them moral beings, and endows them with the fearful attribute of freedom ? Is it in the power of man or angel to sin against God, and not displease and offend him by so doing ? Would not the obedience, from this moment onward, of all created beings, be infinitely more agreeable to the divine will, and in all respects more pleasing to him than their disobedience, under the present moral system ? There can be but one answer to such a question. As the earth in all her course casts her broad pyramid of shadow far behind her, along the heavens, so sin involves not only the transgressor himself in the gloom of eternal night, but sends its shadow afar among the divine purposes. That shadow falls upon the celestial pavements, trembles upon the sea of glass, touches even the eternal throne.