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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VI.

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY AS RELATED TO DIVINE
AGENCY IN CONVERSION.¹

BY REV. AUSTIN PHELPS, PROFESSOR AT ANDOVER.

THE most serious difficulties of religion cluster around certain points of union of doctrines which are opposites, but not contraries, in the system of truth. They stand over against each other for a double purpose: by their differences each defines the outline and reflects the excellence of the other, and by their harmony both magnify the honor of the Author of truth, as neither could do alone.

Such correlative truths are numerous around the point of junction of Divine with human agencies. The difficulties of our faith therefore grow dense around the doctrines of Providence, of Prayer, of Predestination, and perhaps most of all around that of Regeneration. The power of such difficulties depends very much upon the spirit with which they are approached. Three principles, especially, should govern inquiry on such a theme.

First, that inquiry should be conducted with reverence for the prerogatives of God. It is as much the dictate of sober judgment as of a pure conscience to preserve that jealousy in behalf of the divine honor which the apostle expressed when he said: "Let God be true, though every man a liar." Again, in such an inquiry we should expect to come upon insoluble mystery; not absurdity, but mystery; not contradictions, but mystery. Who knoweth the spirit of a man? A child propounds questions concerning it which no man can answer. To whom then will ye liken God? Canst thou by searching find him out to perfection? When therefore from two such fountains the streams emanate which are

¹ A Discourse preached, substantially, in the Chapel of Andover Theological Seminary, on the text, Phil. ii. 12, 13.

commingled in human destiny, shall we expect to find nothing that appeals to faith? In the confluence of two such powers, is it marvellous that to our vision the waters are troubled?

Furthermore, in such an inquiry we should be content with the removal of practical difficulties. It is a principle which the wisest of men have acknowledged in respect of other things than religion, that perplexities which start out of metaphysical science should never be allowed to confuse us in the practical affairs of life. Men who have believed in the non-existence of matter have yet eaten and drunk and slept and walked like their neighbors. Men who have been unable to see the evidence of their existence have yet been very sensitive if other men were as ignorant. Yet, in religious inquiry the human mind exhibits a proneness to disregard this principle of the common sense, by wandering away from plain matters of fact, and, as Isaac Taylor has expressed it, "to beat up and down through regions of night, from which their only escape must be, by a buoyant effort of good sense, to spring up from the abyss to the trodden and familiar surface of things."

With these principles in mind, let us consider

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN AS RELATED TO THE AGENCY OF GOD IN CONVERSION.

I. Let us, in the first place, discern clearly the reality of the difficulty which an inquiring sinner often feels respecting his own responsibility for a result which is still dependant on Almighty power. The difficulty is practical. It is felt by minds which know little, and care less, about philosophical abstractions. Every pastor is familiar with it in the popular experience. No inquiry is pressed with deeper solicitude by a certain class of minds than this: How can these things be? "You tell me," is often the language of their hearts, "you tell me that I must be born again. I must have a new heart and a new spirit. To produce this change is the work of God. You portray this change to me

in language which is itself an appalling expression of my dependence upon invisible and almighty will for its achievements. My puny faculties are affrighted at the conception of a change from darkness to light, from death to life, and from the power of Satan to that of God. Why then do you summon me to any duty in this emergency? What have I to do but to await the revelation of that eternal decree on which my destiny hangs in suspense, like that of a mote upon the law of gravitation? How can I repent? How can I believe? Am I not shut up to this one resource; to stand in dumb agony before the *Will*, as one of your own most venerable theologians has termed it, the *arbitrary Will*, of God? He hath mercy on whom he *will* have mercy." An oppressive significance is sometimes crowded into the words: What must I do to be saved? They are often the outburst of a hopeless intellect, as well as of a burdened conscience.

That this is not an extravagant statement of the practical character of the difficulties which many feel on this subject, will be obvious to any one who is familiar with the unrecorded experience of inquirers when they are made to stand face to face with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in their salvation.

In confirmation and in illustration of this statement, I may be permitted to refer to the experience of one who subsequently became a preacher. In an unpublished communication to a friend, some years after his conversion, he wrote respecting this theme as follows: "Few subjects open to me a deeper abyss than this. The attempt to speak of it recalls to me a period of my life when I can truly say: 'The pains of hell gat hold upon me.' I think I know the difficulties of a sinner burdened by his dependence upon a power out of himself for salvation. I have been all over that land of darkness and of the shadow of death. I have seen those difficulties piled up like Alps on Alps. I recall seven months of my life in which my mind beat about that thought of dependence upon the grace of God without a ray of light or of hope. I searched the scriptures. I read books of

devotion. I conversed with theologians. I ransacked their libraries for some explanation of the mystery which appeared to me then to be a contradiction to my natural ideas of justice. The gloom it created reached at last every part of God's word: I could read no hope there. It covered all nature: I could see no justice there. Sleep became more desirable to me than waking. The morning only woke me to a consciousness of misery; and the feeling excited in me by the sight of the busy world around me was a kind of bitter compassion that so many of them must soon end their little dream of life, and then awake to a wretchedness as complete as mine."

II. Conceding, then, the practical character of the perplexities which often surround the conjunction of these two ideas of responsibility and of dependence in the way of salvation, let us observe, in the second place, the grounds on which the doctrine of man's responsibility stands, and its practical relation to the sovereignty of God in conversion.

1. Responsibility, in any development of it, must rest primarily upon a species of independent evidence which a sound mind cannot resist. A man's own consciousness is the root of the matter. God has so constituted accountable being, that *what* it is is wrought into the consciousness *that* it is. Nothing can go below this; nothing can outrun this. Reasoning here can add nothing to knowledge. Analysis of free-agency can furnish no additional evidence of the fact. Dissection of the body discovers no evidence of vitality. No man can thus demonstrate his own responsibility; yet no man can rid himself of the conviction that he *is* responsible. This is the primal conviction of our moral being. It is to moral existence what the optic nerve is to the eye. It is one of those "high instincts"

" Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day;
Are yet a master light of all our seeing:

.
Truths that wake
To perish never,

Which neither listlessness nor mad endeavor

Can utterly abolish or destroy."

It stays by us when we would fling it from us. It follows hard after us when we would flee from the sight of it. Something holds us to it, more vigorous than logic. We cannot escape it; it is part of us. It is wrought into the structure of every language. Philosophers have reasoned it down; they have voted it out of the world by sage majorities; but the world will not let it go, nor will it let the world go, so long as the word "ought" is intelligible to a sane mind.

On this basis of *knowledge*, then, rests the responsibility of any man, regarded as the general condition of his being. But on the very same basis rests the responsibility of an awakened sinner for instant, absolute, and entire obedience to God's commands; and this at the very hour of his perplexities on the subject of a change of heart. No mind can possess more convincing evidences of its responsibility than that mind which is aroused to ask: "What must I do to be saved?" Such a one knows his responsibility for everything that God requires of him, as with open eye he knows light. Every pang of conviction proves this; every fear proves this. He is *conscious* of guilt in having been a sinner; he is *conscious* of guilt in being a sinner; he is *conscious* of guilt in continuing to be a sinner. His want of penitence is a sin to him. His want of love to God is a sin to him. The guilt is his own; he *feels* it rankling in his own soul. God could not affirm to him his responsibility more distinctly than by the voice of that angered conscience. If that truth were written in the heavens it could be no more authoritative. A revelation of it by one risen from the dead could make it no more sacred. He never has a more imperative disclosure of it to his soul than when his convictions of sin are most homefelt and his fear of eternity most intolerable. Black as may be the abyss in which the philosophy of regeneration seems to leave him, he cannot doubt the fact of his responsibility for being there, and for ceasing to be there at God's

bidding. If he seems to himself to doubt this, he is like an insane man who questions his own existence, and recounts to you the narrative of his own death and burial. The remark of Dr. Johnson upon the philosophical question of freedom is as truthful respecting the fact of a sinner's responsibility for all that God requires of him in salvation: "A man knows it, sir, and that is the whole of it."

2. It is instructive to observe the confidence which the human mind reposes in its knowledge of its own responsibility as this confidence is exhibited in a second fact: that the common sense of men never attributes to sin, however passionate or obdurate, the power to destroy responsibility. The infatuation of guilt never even impairs, in a healthy mind, the sense of the enormity of guilt. However rooted crime becomes, as if in the very nature of the criminal, until we say of him in loose dialect: It *is* his nature to lie, to steal, to murder; he does not know how to do otherwise; evil has possession of him; he hath a devil: yet we never in such modes of speech hold a sinner guiltless; we never loosen the gripe of responsibility upon his being. We still say, with the wise man: "His *own* iniquities shall take the wicked *himself*; and *he* shall be holden with the cords of *his* sins." Penal jurisprudence in civilized law is built upon this principal. It laughs at the fiction of moral insanity as a product of guilt.

Let this principle be illustrated in an occurrence which is yet fresh in our national history. We were told, a few years ago, of a man who sat in the councils of the country, the representative, as he said, of a gallant people; we were told that, under the impulse of revenge, he violated the laws of justice, of honor, of courage, and of civilized humanity, of all that a gallant people should respect. We heard — and did not our ears tingle at the story? — we heard that he crept stealthily, and armed to the teeth, into the highest legislative sanctuary of the land, and there, awaiting his time like an assassin, he felled to the floor a solitary, unarmed, and pinioned man; a man his superior in age, in official rank, in refinement of

taste, in classic learning, in patriotism, in integrity of conscience, in all that can dignify a gentleman and a statesman. Yet the gallant assassin told us : " I meant no wrong ; I was conscious of no crime ; I purposed only to inflict the chastisement which I would give to a servant or a dog." But what was our answer ? We said by the mouth of one of our representatives, as you may remember : " That was a brutal and cowardly and murderous deed." Yet the noble assassin condescended to say to us : " No, oh no ! you do me wrong ; I did not know the force of the blows I struck ; it was but a reed that I held in my hand ; and that first blow aroused the demon in my heart ; after that, I knew not what I did ; and it was well for him, yes, it was well for him, that he did not resist my fury." But again, what was our answer ? We compressed it with indignant lips ; we said to the august assassin : " He smote his victim as Cain did his brother."

Did we not believe those words ? Did we not hold the man to be a man, and therefore responsible for his blindfold conscience, and his infuriated passion, and for all the consequences ? Did we not hold him guilty for not knowing what he did ? Did we not believe it to have been his own spirit that was the demon in his heart ? Was it not a free demon ? Was it not a voluntary demon ? Was it not a responsible demon ? Who believes that he was unable to resist the impulses of that demoniacal possession ? When the eyes of twenty millions flashed fire, and their lips execrated the deed, was it in rebuke of a poor lunatic who had strayed from the tombs ? When the echo of those blows came back to us from the other side of the Atlantic, in the outcry of the civilized world, from Gibraltar to Siberia, against the barbarism of American institutions, was it a mistaken cruelty towards one whose dwelling was with the beasts of the field, and who did eat grass like oxen ? Oh no, no ! The common conscience of the world answers, No. The common sense of the world responds, No. The reverberation of cannon and the tramp of a million armed men have protested, No. Impartial History will confirm the verdict, No. Thoughtful

men, but a few months after, stood around an open grave. They shut their mouths in awe-struck silence. That which had not been told them, they saw ; that which they had not heard, did they consider. They thought within themselves : Here lies a poor, deluded, blinded, infatuated sinner, but still a deluded *sinner*, a blinded *sinner*, an infatuated *sinner*. They thought of the verdict sometimes rendered at an inquest to which death has not given up its secret : " Died by visitation of God." Christian minds, the world over, when they heard of that untimely end, remembered God's own decree : " Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." And all the people said " Amen." So impossible is it to stultify the moral convictions of the world, by the figment of a moral responsibility destroyed by the obduracy or the passionateness of guilt.

3. A third fact adds the authority of revelation to that of conscience in testimony to the truth before us. It is that the scriptures hold man responsible for a compliance with the conditions of salvation. They hold him to account for the entire character which renders salvation a fact. This has never been intelligently questioned. It is one of the points of indubitable and unbroken alliance between revelation and conscience. The word of God is here but the echo of his work. The scriptures hold a sinner, an unregenerate sinner, responsible for repentance of sin and for faith in Christ, and for everything else which is a constituent of a regenerate character. No hint is given that this responsibility is at all dependent on the gift of regenerating grace. Duties and graces are urged upon the natural consciences of men, with no qualification whatever. To an unsophisticated reader men seem to be exhorted to repent and believe, to love, to trust, to obey, to adore, to praise, to be perfect as God is perfect, with the same freedom with which they are commanded to refrain from lying, from stealing, from murder. The inspired writers treat the whole subject with a boldness which is often startling, and yet refreshing, by the side of some of the wary and diplomatic methods of cate-

chetical theology. They do not seem to have been embarrassed by their own equally bold conceptions of the sovereignty of God. One whose mind has wandered over the immensity of these themes, with no practical object by which to test its convictions, and on which to concentrate them, may be astonished at the daring with which the inspired writers use the truths at which philosophy has stood aghast. It is the usual method of inspiration to assume the responsibility of a sinner, and to urge upon him the duties of repentance, of faith, of submission, of perfect obedience, unqualified by any mention whatever of his dependence upon God. Duty is urged as if a sinner had no concern with anything else than duty. Yet turn a leaf, and we see absolute dependence and eternal decree unrolled like the scroll of fate, with no proviso to save the freedom of a man; as if decree and dependence were the only pillars of God's government. If we are timid lest our theologic formulæ should be unravelled in the process, we tremble when we read: "Wash you, make you clean"; "Without me ye can do nothing": "Make to yourselves a new heart"; Our sufficiency is of God": "Repent and be converted"; "He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy": "Submit yourselves unto God"; "And whom he will he hardeneth": "Work out your own salvation"; "It is God that worketh in you": "Awake thou that sleepest"; "The Lord hath poured upon you the spirit of a deep sleep": "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"; "God shall send them delusion, that they should believe a lie": "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die!" "That they all might be damned which believe not the truth."

Pages of these paradoxical responses might be compiled from the scriptures. Are we prompt to exclaim: This is more than paradox; it is contradiction? It is such contradiction as Paul indulges when he says: "we are deceivers, yet true; unknown, yet well known; dying, yet we live; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing all things." Such verbal contradictions are the profoundest harmonies. They are the

index of a masculine grasp of truth. It is not the way of great souls, moved by great truths, to be content with conceptions which can be sifted clean of paradox, and their residuum measured with algebraic exactness. Great truths have caverns of thought which lie below scientific language ; and great minds are ever exploring those recesses. Thus it is with inspiration, which is only the greatness of divine thought. Inspired conception holds these opposites of truth with no sense of contradiction. A serenity of faith pervades the inspired thought upon them, like the tranquility which no tempest breaks at the bottom of the Atlantic. When such thought comes to be expressed in speech it refuses qualifications and provisoes. It takes on bold and craggy forms. It loves the mind that dares to speak it outright, and then leave it in the majesty of its singleness. Such is the celestial calmness with which inspired minds have dealt with the responsibility of man. They betray no sense of shame at their heedlessness of the divine honor in urging the claims of duty with an importunity which seems to forget all else than duty. A doubt of the completeness of man's responsibility for the discharge of his duty, and of the whole of it, is never tolerated by them. Those difficulties of inquiry which, if they mean anything, signify an implication of injustice in holding man accountable under the law of sovereignty, are met with rebuke rather than with reasoning: "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?"

4. From the authoritative tone with which both the consciousness of men and the word of God thus teach the responsibility of unregenerate mind we are led, in the fourth place, to infer the ability of an unregenerate sinner to obey all the divine commands which are laid upon him. What precisely do we mean by this? That an unregenerate mind remaining unregenerate, can obey God? No; we do not so trifle with contradiction in terms. The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. A man with closed eyes does not see a precipice at mid-day, neither indeed can he see it; one step therefore may plunge him to the bot-

tom. But he can open his eyes ; what then ? Is there no difference between a man with voluntarily closed eyes and a blind man ? Is there none between a man who will not see and a man *born* blind ? So we do not deny the truism that a sinner remaining impenitent cannot repent ; he cannot be and not be at the same moment. But he can choose not to remain impenitent ; what then ? Is there no difference between a sinner who cannot because he will not repent, and a sinner who cannot because he is " disabled " to will otherwise ? Is there none between one who cannot because he will not and one who is *born* disabled ? We use language, then, in the strict and proper sense of it, as the common mind interprets it, when we affirm the inevitable inference from human consciousness and the word of God, that an unregenerate sinner can obey all the commands of God.

A child's book exists in our Sabbath-school literature, with the simple yet profoundly philosophic title : " I can, because I ought." The fresh mind of childhood never denied the truth expressed in those words. The conscience of a child must be awed down by authority into unnatural contortions, before it will create the feeling or the belief of guilt in that child's heart for that which he did not originate and cannot control. " I can, because I ought : " Ability—the necessary inference from obligation ; obligation—the measure of ability. The central truth which gives value to the tomes of theological lore on this subject is compressed into those words. It is impossible that reasoning should go below it or around it with the purpose of evasion. It is ultimate ; thought can go no further. We reason around and around the immensity of the theme, and an invisible thread conducts us through the labyrinth back to the point at which we started, and at which every child can see as far as the keenest of us. " I can, because I ought " : we struggle to go by this truth ; we traverse the universe in our philosophic search for something beyond it ; but at the circumference of our journey we have not outrun it, any more than we can outrun the evening star in search for the horizon. We plunge into the depths of our

own being in quest of something which consciousness may have treasured up beneath it, but at the bottom of all things we find it awaiting us, "a gem of purest ray serene." "I can, because I ought": it is one of those truths which we carry with us because it is a part of us. We cannot look into any mirror of truth without seeing the reflection of it. It is like an omnipresent Deity. It is indeed the voice of God within us. We may say of it: "Thou hast beset me behind and before; thou hast laid thy hand upon me. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me: yea the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. Thou hast possessed my reins: I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

"I can, because I ought." This, then, is the conviction with which an inquiring sinner must meet the question of his own salvation. I can obey, because God requires me to obey. I can repent, because I feel guilty for not repenting. God would not demand of me to do what I cannot do. God would never have so constituted my being that I must feel guilty for not doing what I cannot do. This is the irresistible reasoning of any unsophisticated mind. The common sense of the world reasons so without hesitation and without exception. Teach your child that he has lied to you because he could not help it, and will he justify your rod? Teach a thief that he stole because the necessity of his avaricious nature was upon him, and will he look up self-condemned to your barred windows and bolted doors and armed sentinels? Teach a murderer that he shed the blood of his victim because *he* was the victim of an insane malignity over which he had no power, and will he confess the awful excellence of justice on your scaffold? If he does, it will be simply because he knows better than your teachings.

So, proclaim to an inquiring sinner that he is a sinner because he cannot be anything else; that he hates God

because it is his nature to hate God ; that he is a depraved being and a child of wrath because he was born such ; that he does not repent because he is impotent to repent ; that he does not obey God because the power is not in him to obey God ; that therefore if he is not saved it is because God has not elected him to salvation ; and will he feel the damning guilt of his condition, the equity of his doom, the awful righteousness of the coming judgment ? If he does so, it will be because Conscience and the Holy Ghost are mightier than your theology. Never, never does reason draw such conclusion from such premises. The common sense of the world never reasons so.

The common sense, moreover, refuses to be mystified in its reasonings by any distinction between power in character and power in act ; between power to be and power to do. To the popular mind if a man cannot he cannot ; and that is the end of it. Obligation, guilt, just condemnation, remorse, punishment honorable to law — not one of these can co-exist with impotence in the being of whom they are affirmed. No matter whether the sinfulness in question be innate depravity or that of an act of murder ; the reasoning of the common sense is the same. Inability to *be* all that God requires is a bar to the justice of requirement, as absolute as inability to withold the stroke of a dagger is to the justice of the gibbet. An “insane murderer” is no more an impossible contradiction in any civilized court of law than a “disabled sinner” is at the bar of God. We count it to the honor of our humane civilization that our asylums, more sacred than “cities of refuge” from the avenger of blood, are thrown open to the insane homicide, and he is reverently cared for as a brother on whom the hand of God rests. If then it be conceivable that, anywhere in the universe, there are moral beings who are “disabled unto all good,” shall not He whose ways are equal and whose name is Love find, somewhere among the still planets, a retreat where those afflicted spirits may hide themselves till their tangled and broken faculties shall be allured back again into symmetry and wholeness ?

Shall such beings be left to call on the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne? Whose reason would not reel if this were true?

Thus, be it repeated, thus reasons the common sense of men. There is no sense in *reasoning* otherwise. If the opposite conviction is established, it must be by authority, not by reasoning. But it is unsafe to question, on any authority, such a primal conviction of the soul. It is hazardous to the integrity of mind in all its operations. It hoodwinks perception of right and wrong. It blunts sensibility to good and evil. It deadens, therefore, the soul's response to the nature of God as a God of equity and of judgment. Moreover, such a denial of the mind's necessary belief is unphilosophical. So to use any conceivable authority as to array it by sheer power against a first principle of belief, is to defeat that very authority in the very act of its assertion; for the foundation of all authority over intelligent belief is inundated and swept away in the process. Faith has then no more bottom to stand on than reason. Both go to wreck together. If I cannot trust one necessary belief, I cannot another. I have nothing left on which to build faith in a revelation. My soul then sinks in unbelief to depths immeasurable, in which all that it knows is that it knows nothing, believes nothing, hopes nothing. To borrow a similitude, such denial of ability to obey a command of God is to the whole structure of a moral being like the magnetic mountain to the navigator in the Arabian story. As he sailed alongside of it, it drew out the clamping-irons of his vessel, and the timbers fell asunder, and the ship was wrecked, though in still waters on a summer's day.

Once more, "I can, because I ought." We cast reflection, then, upon God's honor if we deny this in respect of obedience to his commands in the way of salvation. We implicate the word of God in a collision with his works; and we involve his work, in the structure of a soul, in a more awful conflict with itself. We should be jealous for the divine prerogative in this thing. Shall the thing formed have rea-

son to say unto Him that formed it: "Why hast thou made me thus?"

5. We are prepared, then, to observe, in the fifth place, that in this view of responsibility there is no conflict with the truth of a sinner's dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Reason affirms no conflict here any more than revelation. If a sinner is not dependent on regenerating grace for ability to do his duty, he is not dependent on regenerating grace for anything that is essential to responsibility for the performance of his duty. If dependence is not for the power but for the will to obey, reason has no more difficulty than faith in determining responsibility. Not only is no contradiction proved, but none is suggested between responsibility and dependence. We cannot properly speak of reconciling these truths; we can discern no variance between them to be removed. Our conceptions of them fall into the same ease and harmony of thought in which they seem to have lain in inspired minds. The dependence of a being who is responsible because able to do all that God requires of him, is no more the dependence of necessity, but the dependence of sheer guilt. It is not the dependence of a diseased man upon the herb that shall restore him. It is not the dependence of a disabled man upon the surgeon who shall set the broken limb. It is not the dependence of the man with a withered hand upon the miracle that shall make it whole like the other. It is the dependence of a perverse man, who of himself will not be other than a perverse man, upon the power that shall incline him to obedience. It is the dependence of a liar, who of himself will not be other than a liar, upon the influences that induce him to be truthful. It is the dependence of a murderer, who of himself will not be other than a murderer, upon the friend who shall persuade him to put up his dagger into its sheath. This, which in kind and when applied to elemental changes of character, is the most profound and terrific dependence under which a moral being can exist, stands side by side with responsible being, with no collision, with not a breath of discord between them. The two thoughts

are like angels locked hand in hand, in ministering to God's will and vindicating his way to men.

Is it still said that mystery hangs over the whole conception of a being who can but will not be other than a sinner until God constrains him? True; it is the great marvel of the universe that any being *will* not obey God. Is it said that mystery covers the junction of Divine influence with human power in the change of a sinner's heart? True; and the savage fled in terror from the artist's studio when he first saw his own portrait, because he could not understand the mystery of the artist's pencil, which could so represent him on the canvas without abstracting a part of him. Is it said that mystery buries in darkness the turning-point of character at which a sinner becomes a changed being; a sinner who now, without God, will not be other than a sinner, yet then, through God, is a believer; who now will not but be a child of wrath, yet then is an heir of glory; that we cannot penetrate to the heart of this? True; great is the mystery of godliness. And not unlike this mystery is the fact that a man cannot see the power of his own vision; cannot look at the nerve which lies back of his own eyeball; cannot take in his hand the filament which connects that nerve with the spiritual seer who is behind it. But mystery is not contradiction. It is not even a seeming contradiction. An apparent absurdity *is* an absurdity to us until we believe, and have reason to believe, it to be only apparent. Mystery is not this; it is only a hint of magnitude. We must fall back, therefore, upon the conviction of responsibility for guilt, and of the dependence of guilt, as upon two of the elemental truths on which rests the government of God over our world. We may think and speak of them at our ease, without the most secret suspicion of their inconsistency, or fear of a collision. We may preach them as inspired men have preached them, with intensity of conception, with boldness of speech, with singleness of aim. These are the only methods in which they can be preached by men who are in earnest.

III. Let us then, in conclusion, observe some of the results of this discussion as they bear specifically upon the methods of the pulpit in addressing inquirers after the way of salvation.

1. The pulpit should urge upon men the performance of the conditions of salvation with the same unrestricted freedom of speech with which it would press the discharge of any other duty. Men should be invited, persuaded, entreated, commanded to repent and believe, with the same unqualified boldness with which we should teach them to speak the truth, to pay an honest debt, to befriend the widow and the fatherless. Responsibility is as perfect in the one class of duties as in the other. Duty is as absolute. The responsibility in both cases rests upon the same immutable basis — the intrinsic justice of a Divine command, and the indestructible ability of man to obey. The sinner is responsible for repentance and faith to the full extent of Divine requirement, simply because God requires them and because the sinner is able to render them. The pulpit should seek to penetrate with this conviction the soul of every man who would know what he must do to be saved. We owe it to the simplicity of the truth to clear it of contradictions in the troubled thoughts of an inquirer. We should strip it of factitious mystery. We should let the absolute sacredness of Duty, backed by the sanctions of Eternity, come home to the conscience in words simple and few, without qualification or proviso.

The fiction of inability to obey a command of God, with which an inquiring mind is often blinded, should be commonly treated as a Satanic suggestion. That conviction of inability does not exist often in such a mind in the forms of metaphysic and theologic statement in which technical definition makes the fiction a truth. A mind oppressed by fear of hell is in no mood, commonly, to appreciate our philosophical distinction between "natural" and "moral" inability. The plea of inability by which a convicted sinner parries duty, exists in the plain, homely sense of words which mean to the distracted soul just what they seem to mean in literal

speech. "Cannot" is "cannot," nothing more, nothing less. It conveys but one idea. That idea has to him no metaphysical double sense. It is intensely literal, and as intensely false. It arrays Conscience and Fact, God and Truth, in defiant hostility to each other. The sinner says to his soul: "God commands me to do this thing — I cannot; God commands me to repent — I cannot; God commands me to believe — I cannot. He commands, knowing that I cannot obey. It is as if he commanded me to restore the lost Pleiad." This conviction, we repeat, in this unscientific form in which it holds inquiring souls in bondage, should be treated as a stupendous delusion. The inquirer should be thrown back upon the imperative teachings of the scriptures and of the common sense. He should be made to feel that in cherishing such a sense of impotence he is clinging to the refuge of a falsehood. He is stultifying his own reason, defying his own conscience, and charging God with crime. We have no right, my brethren, we have no right as ministers of truth, to suffer a sinner to go from our ministrations to the bar of God in the dilemma of either falsifying his reason or repudiating his conscience, and therefore with all the forces of truth thrown into panic in his soul, through the contradiction of his necessary beliefs to our delivery of God's commands.

It is unphilosophical and unsafe, as well as unscriptural, to preach the duty of repentance less imperatively than inspired men have preached it. We have no authority to lengthen or to soften the peremptory words of the Holy Ghost. We should not so far yield to the fiction of inability as to say to the inquiring sinner: "Repent if you can; try to repent; repent of such sins as you can repent of; use the means of repentance; pray that you may be enabled to repent"; and to *say no more*. It is neither reasonable nor scriptural to entice a sinner up thus to a side-look upon his duty, and *leave him there*. He should be led around to the front, and urged to face the truth in its imperative singleness — "Repent"; and this with the full force of the impli-

cation, and if need be, the statement that he *can* repent. With Divine grace or without it, regenerate or unregenerate, elect or non-elect, his responsibility is as perfect as God can make it. Radically, it does not depend on Divine grace. Temptation does not fundamentally affect it. "God doth not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." The unregenerate sinner should be taught that he has the power to do anything which God has the will to command. We never get the unbroken force of Conscience over to the side of truth otherwise.

But is not the preaching of an unqualified responsibility perilous? Will not a sinner be tempted to revel in his freedom? Will he not say within himself: "My soul is my own; salvation is in my own power; I have but to will it, and Heaven is at my bidding; Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years in this power to repent at thy pleasure; take thine ease?" Perhaps so; what distortion will not sin prompt in evasion or in caricature of truth? Yet God does not therefore abolish the perils of probation. It were sufficient to say that He who spake as never man spake thus preached repentance in bold and unguarded words. But here, as elsewhere, truth carries its own safeguards. For,

2. A second consequence of the principles we have considered is, that the pulpit should proclaim the dependence of a sinner upon the Holy Ghost for the will to repent as being a *more* profound reality than if it were dependence for the power to repent.

Two methods are here suggested of preaching the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. They may have the same end in view, may be adopted with equal conscientiousness, and may be prompted by the same devout desire to honor God. Yet they are very unequal in the depth to which they penetrate truth, and the force with which they use it. They are very dissimilar also in the skill with which they avoid perversions of the truth in the result. The one method is to exalt the sovereignty of God in salvation as a work of mere Power. The other is to exalt the sovereignty of God in salvation as

a work of Moral Government. In the one case, God is made to appear sovereign of a sinner's destiny, as he is of the elements in a tempest. He can say to the passions of guilt: Be still; and they shall obey him. His sway of the soul is like his sway of the sea. Both are exhibitions of power — grand, magnificent, overwhelming it may be, but still power, and that only. The final impression of the beholder is that of the glory of Omnipotence. In the other case, God is represented as sovereign in the work of salvation under the conditions of a moral system. He ordained those conditions from eternity. They are sacred to him. His own integrity is pledged to them. He cannot violate them with impunity to his own consciousness of rectitude. They were planned in the counsels of eternity for the display of his moral glory as supreme over his natural perfections. His sway of a soul, therefore, is unique. It is like nothing else in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. It is not an exercise of power only. The final impression upon a beholder is not that of omnipotence supremely; but of omnipotence in the service of justice, holiness, truth, love. It is that of infinite power regulated by infinite integrity. The perspective of the system is so adjusted that the spectator shall look through the natural to the moral disclosures of the Divine glory. He sees, not unlimited Force driving before it an insensate thing, but infinite Holiness swaying a free mind, through all the sinuosities of its choice, by the delicate, intricate, and balanced working of moral laws.

Now, the difference between these two methods of representing the sovereignty of God in salvation is vital to the pulpit. It corresponds to the difference between Might and Right. It is just the difference between appeal to the sense of weakness and appeal to the sense of sin. It is vitally significant to the pulpit in several respects. In the first place, a preacher can much more easily impress upon men a sense of the sovereignty of might than that of the sovereignty of right. A fallen mind takes in the idea of a God of power more spontaneously than that of a God of rectitude. Again,

an awakened soul, agitated by fear, is specially receptive of the truth of Divine Power; yet that soul goaded by remorse, and quick to spring to anything that shall help it to fling elsewhere the load of its guilt, is specially impervious to the truth of Divine integrity. A God sovereign by might is less ungenial with the bitterness of its spirit than a God sovereign by right. Still further, the drift of a tempted soul is to accept the conviction of God's power at the *expense* of his justice. The leanings of guilt are all one way. Subjection to an infinite tyranny is less revolting to it than submission to infinite equity.

Is there, then, no peril indicated here to our preaching of the Divine Sovereignty? Is there no danger that the scriptural proportions of truth may become distorted in the portraiture we draw of the Divine government? What if in our solicitude to exalt the power of God we so depict it that we unwittingly elevate it above his holiness? Is there no danger then? What if we so imperiously proclaim his omnipotence over a guilty soul that the practical impression upon that soul obscures all sense of his equity, his sincerity, his honor, his love? Is there no risk then? What if we so preach, as God's vicegerents, that, though unconscious of any such design, we throw out discordant fragments of the truth this way and that, and they happen to fall in with the cavils of a tempted spirit, and seem to consolidate its sense of sheer dominion at the expense of all the holy and amiable attributes of God in his moral government? Is there no hazard there? What if, to make sure that the Divine authority shall not be understated, we seem, though we should be shocked by the imputation of any such purpose, yet we seem to the common sense of our hearers to build God's government upon principles which would doom any human government on earth to execration? Is there no peril in that?

Yet, from these two methods of regarding Divine sovereignty arise corresponding methods of preaching the dependence of a sinner upon the Holy Spirit for salvation. By the one method, it is the dependence of necessity; by the other,

the dependence of guilt. The dependence is absolute in either case. No interest of truth is served by ignoring or retrenching that. So long as a sinner will not repent without Divine grace, his dependence upon that grace is as perfect in degree, though not the same in kind, as if he could not repent. But because it is not the same in kind, the moral significance of it is unspeakably the more intense. As necessity knows no law, so the dependence of necessity knows no guilt. It has no moral significance. Not so the dependence which our subject teaches. The very groundwork of this is guilt, and guilt only. Thus the pulpit should proclaim it. We should so preach a sinner's dependence upon the Holy Ghost as to keep the moral rectitude of God in the foreground of his power. The helplessness of which we seek to make the sinner conscious should be, not the helplessness of disease, but the helplessness of sin. We should picture him to his own conscience, not primarily as infirmity leaning upon infinite strength, but as guilt resting against infinite holiness. We should portray a dependence which can give him no peace so long as he remains impenitent. It should be a dependence which brings together all the elements of God's moral government to intensify the holiness of God on the one hand, and on the other the sinfulness of sin. It should heap the whole burden of sin upon the sinner's own will.

Preaching, then, should be clear and bold in its implications, and if need be in its assertions, of this dependence of guilt, and of guilt only, while impenitence holds out. Our exhortations to an impenitent sinner should imply, and if needful say to him: "You can repent; you can turn to God; you ought to do it; by every principle of equity and of honor, he holds you responsible for doing it; but this is the very head and front of your offending, that you will not do it till his grace constrains you. It depends, therefore, upon his sovereign will whether you shall be saved or lost. The more profound your guilt the more absolute is your dependence; and the more absolute your dependence the more aggravated

is your guilt. Each is the gauge of the other. Time consolidates both. Left to yourself, therefore, you must *more* surely perish, and more hopelessly, than if you could not repent. The climax of your peril is in resistance to the Holy Ghost. Years in ease are years of defiance to infinite holiness. The one sin which shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come, is sin against the Holy Ghost. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that ye should pray for it."

But are not such conceptions of dependence and guilt repellant? Do they not shock hope? Does not such preaching therefore invite despair? Yes, if impenitence be incorrigible. Truth and sin are implacable foes. It is one of the perils of their contact that it may hasten the catastrophe of a soul's ruin. Yet here again, the preaching of truth provides its own defences by suggesting all the alleviation of its terrors which can be beneficent to a sinner in his impenitence. Not only are his cavils against the rectitude of God's government silenced, but,

3. A third result from the principles we have reviewed is, that the pulpit is at liberty to proclaim the offer of the Holy Spirit to the sinner as being in unqualified language the gift of God's mercy. We preach it not as the gift of justice to necessity; not even as the gift of pity to misfortune; but as the gift of mercy to guilt. Were man's dependence upon God in regeneration a dependence for power to repent, regeneration could be only an act of justice—nothing more. Grace should be no more grace. If a preacher must say to an awakened sinner: "True, you cannot obey God, but the Holy Spirit can enable you to obey; you have no power to repent, but the Holy Spirit can give you repentance; you have no ability to believe, but the Holy Spirit can give you faith"; the reply is inevitable: "Then the gift of the Holy Spirit is my right in equity; I have a claim in eternal justice to regeneration, if commands are laid upon me which I cannot obey without it. Impossible duties are the demand of tyranny." To inquiring minds this reasoning is as resistless

as lightning. They are astonished that it does not strike the pulpit dumb.

But we preach the gospel of salvation with no such lurid logic in the background. We are free to proclaim the work of the Holy Ghost as the gift of Mercy to Guilt. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed! While we are yet sinners, grace comes to our deliverance. The sinner in the very act of sin, at the very height of rebellion, able to yield, but persistent in treason, with power calling upon guilt and guilt responding to power, is overtaken, enclosed, and subdued by regenerating love. Such is the reach of infinite mercy. Let the pulpit be jubilant in proclaiming the gift of the Holy Ghost as a token, superadded to the gift of Christ, of the sincerity of God in his desire to save lost men. Let us exult in the strains of Biblical invitation, promise, exposition. The gift of the Holy Spirit is proof in act that they mean just what they seem to mean: "Ho, every one that thirsteth; The Spirit and the Bride say come; Whosoever will, let him come; I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; Why will ye die?"

But after all, will not such preaching fail through want of individuality in a sinner's faith in it? Will he not say: "True, God is infinitely holy and infinitely merciful; but what is that to *me*? How do I know that he purposes to regenerate *me*? Must I not await his time for my salvation? Is not the dependence of guilt just as hopeless as the dependence of necessity? Is not the certainty of sin the certainty of damnation?" Yes; if a sinner *will* have it so. But truth benignly pursues him even to this selfish isolation in his guilt. For,

4. A fourth result of the principles we have discussed is, that the pulpit is free to assure men that they have every encouragement to immediate repentance which is possible to a state of sin. Holy encouragement is not possible to hope in incorrigible guilt. But a sinner, once convinced of sin, has all the encouragement that he *can* have to immediate action in the duty of repentance. He has the assurance of the benign-

nity of God's command to repent ; of his own ability to obey ; of the complacency of God in every desire he cherishes to obey ; of the co-working of the Holy Spirit even in every conviction he feels that he ought to obey ; of the sincerity of the Spirit in the very pressure of which he is conscious of the motives to obey ; and of the possibility that even now the Spirit may overpower his guilt, and make him willing to obey. Beyond this, holy encouragement cannot extend. No honest soul will ask for more than this. If a sinner accepts other cheer than this, it is because his is not an honest soul. Anything less or more than this simple urgency of immediate duty in reliance upon the Holy Ghost, would only deepen the hopelessness of a sinner in his guilt. No other exhortation comes right home to his emergency as this does : " Work, for God worketh in thee." This is no mockery. It is intensely real, as expressing both God's sincerity and the sinner's duty. The practical force of that much-abused exhortation is simply this : Be in earnest to save yourself, because God is in earnest to save you. Salvation, then, is sure, in the act of instant repentance. This is what the sinner must *do* to be saved.

But is the inquiry still pressed : Will the Holy Spirit certainly bless my endeavors ? We answer : What endeavors ? The endeavors of guilt to evade the consciousness of guilt ? No : When He the Spirit of truth is come, he will reprove the world of sin. But again, what endeavors ? Endeavors to be saved in the indulgence of sin ? No : the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. But again, what endeavors ? Endeavors to fasten the responsibility of sin and its fruits upon the sovereignty of God's decrees ? Nay, but who art thou, O man, that repliest against God ? Yet again, what endeavors ? The endeavors of an earnest spirit to believe and love and obey ? Thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy : " I *dwell* with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

But, does a sinner say : " Mine is not a contrite spirit ; can

I then be assured that God will give me repentance? Is that irreversible decree, formed before the world was, anywhere revealed to me that, taking me just as I am, God will change my heart?" We answer, No. God gives no such assurance. He reveals no such decrees. He has no answer to give to such inquiry. We listen, as that cry goes up to the throne of mercy, and there is silence in heaven. We hear no responses in the air; we see no handwriting in the clouds. He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy:

"Not Gabriel asks the reason why,
Nor God the reason gives."

This is the point precisely to which the whole bearing of the pulpit should conduct men in their search for peace to their souls—that they stand face to face with God, dependent for eternal life upon his good pleasure, with every possible encouragement, even to the assurance of salvation, in instant obedience to his commands, and with nothing but despair in disobedience or in delay. What God purposes to do respecting the regeneration of any soul he has not revealed to any mortal ear. He does not ask our attention nor invite our inquiries to that secret of his own will. He urges upon our thoughts our own doing; what we have done, what we must do. There is no secret about that; it is open and clear as the morning.

But what if such preaching of the gospel fails? What if its only fruit is to awaken the lamentation of the preacher: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed"? Even then, truth is its own vindication, and the ways of God are equal. For,

5. The final consequence from the principles we have contemplated is, that the pulpit should proclaim a sinner's destruction to be always his own doing. A preacher may be called to portray the history of the Holy Spirit's work on many souls in the words once dropped in tears over Jerusalem: "How often would I but ye would not." Our proclamation should be, that it does not extenuate a lost sinner's guilt that God never decreed to regenerate him. Where is the sinner's claim to that decree? Not in defect of responsi-

bility ; that has been without fracture from the first to the last. Not in default of knowledge ; his knowledge and his duty have but measured each other. Not in bondage of probation ; his probation never rose above the level of his freedom. Not in severity of temptation ; temptation at its floodtide was but opportunity for more blessed achievement. His liberty to obey God's commands was infinitely more sacred in God's sight than in his own. Never was its awful sanctity suspended or overborne for one moment. God has guarded it as the apple of his eye. To no being in the universe, then, is the perdition of a sinner to be primarily ascribed but to himself.

But this is not all. We must proclaim the history of a lost soul in words of more intense significance. That is not a history of negative probation. God has never thrust a sinner upon trial in the sheer strength of his freedom, and *let him alone*. God has been more than just to him. By the very conditions of his being, the sinner has been the object of all the amiable affections of the Divine nature. He has been placed upon an infinitely beneficent system of trial. He has been instructed in all that God has held him accountable for ; his own intuitions have taught him ; the works of God have enlightened him ; his own conscience has been the foreshadow of the judgment to him ; there has never been an hour of his moral being when he did not know enough for his salvation. Everything that he has known of God has assumed also the benign form of a dissuasive from sin ; his experience has generated countless motives to obedience ; his steps have been thronged by them as by pleading spirits ; but for his guilt, his conscience alone would have been an ever-present song of God's love to him ; if he has had Christian training, the disclosures of redemption have opened upon him the most intense system of allurements to holiness known to the universe ; the teachings of wise men, the prayers of good men, the visions of inspired men, and the ministrations of angels have stretched a cordon of holy sympathies around him ; the cross of Christ has blocked his way

to destruction more impassably than by a flaming sword; intercession in heaven has been made for him with hands uplifted in which were the prints of the nails; the Holy Spirit has striven with him to turn him back, by all the devices which infinite ingenuity could frame at the bidding of infinite compassion; his history has been one long struggle against obstacles to the suicide of his soul; he has sought out, and discovered, and selected, and seized upon, and made sure of, his *own* way over and around and through them, to the world of despair. *He* has done it—*he*, and not another. Such is every lost life. Is it any marvel that a lost soul is speechless?