

THOUGHTS UPON NECESSITY.

TO THE READER.

I HAD finished what I designed to say on this subject, when the "Essay on Liberty and Necessity" fell into my hands: A most elaborate piece, touched and retouched with all possible care. This has occasioned a considerable enlargement of the following tract. I would fain place mankind in a fairer point of view than that writer has done; as I cannot believe the noblest creature in the visible world to be only a fine piece of clock-work.

Is man a free agent, or is he not? Are his actions free or necessary? Is he self-determined in acting; or is he determined by some other being? Is the principle which determines him to act, in himself or in another? This is the question which I want to consider. And is it not an important one? Surely there is not one of greater importance in the whole nature of things. For what is there that more nearly concerns all that are born of women? What can be conceived which more deeply affects, not some only, but every child of man?

1. That man is not self-determined; that the principle of action is lodged, not in himself, but in some other being; has been an exceeding ancient opinion, yea, near as old as the foundation of the world. It seems, none that admit of Revelation can have any doubt of this. For it was unquestionably the sentiment of Adam soon after he had eaten of the forbidden fruit. He imputes what he had done, not to himself, but another, "The woman whom thou gavest me." It was also the sentiment of Eve, "The Serpent, he beguiled me, and I did eat." "It is true, I did eat; but the cause of my eating, the spring of my action, was in another."

2. The same opinion, that man is not self-determined, took root very early, and spread wide, particularly in the eastern world, many ages before Manes was born. Afterwards indeed, he, and his followers, commonly called Manichees, formed it into a regular system. They not only maintained, that all the

actions of man were necessarily determined by a power exterior to himself, but likewise accounted for it, by ascribing the good to Oromasdes, the parent of all good; the evil to the other independent being, Arimanius, the parent of all evil.

3. From the eastern world, "when arts and empire learned to travel west," this opinion travelled with them into Europe, and soon found its way into Greece. Here it was earnestly espoused and vehemently maintained by the Stoic philosophers; men of great renown among persons of literature, and some of the ablest disputants in the world. These affirmed with one mouth, that from the beginning of the world, if not rather from all eternity, there was an indissoluble chain of causes and effects, which included all human actions; and that these were by fate so connected together, that not one link of the chain could be broken.

4. A fine writer of our own country, who was a few years since gathered to his fathers, has with admirable skill drawn the same conclusion from different premises. He lays it down as a principle, (and a principle it is, which cannot reasonably be denied,) that as long as the soul is vitally united to the body, all its operations depend on the body; that in particular all our thoughts depend upon the vibrations of the fibres of the brain; and of consequence vary, more or less, as those vibrations vary. In that expression, "our thoughts," he comprises all our sensations, all our reflections and passions; yea, and all our volitions, and consequently our actions, which, he supposes, unavoidably follow those vibrations. He premises, "But you will say, This scheme infers the universal necessity of human actions;" and frankly adds, "Certainly it does. I am sorry for it; but I cannot help it."

5. And this is the scheme which is now adopted by not a few of the most sensible men in our nation. One of these fairly confessing, that "he did not think himself a sinner," was asked, "Do you never feel any wrong tempers? And do you never speak or act in such a manner as your own reason condemns?" He candidly answered, "Indeed I do. I frequently feel tempers, and speak many words, and do many actions, which I do not approve of. But I cannot avoid it. They result, whether I will or no, from the vibrations of my brain, together with the motion of my blood, and the flow of my animal spirits. But these are not in my own power. I cannot help them. They are independent on

my choice. And therefore I cannot apprehend myself to be a sinner on this account."

6. Very lately another gentleman, in free conversation, was carrying this matter a little farther. Being asked, "Do you believe God is almighty?" he answered, "I do; or he could not have made the world." "Do you believe he is wise?" "I cannot tell. Much may be said on both sides." "Do you believe he is good?" "No; I cannot believe it. I believe just the contrary. For all the evil in the world is owing to Him. I can ascribe it to no other cause. I cannot blame that cur for barking or biting; it is his nature; and he did not make himself. I feel wrong tempers in myself; but that is not my fault; for I cannot help it. It is my nature; and I could not prevent my having this nature, neither can I change it."

7. The Assembly of Divines, who met at Westminster in the last century, express very nearly the same sentiment, though placed in a different light. They speak to this effect: "Whatever happens in time, was unchangeably determined from all eternity. God ordained or ever the world was made, all the things that should come to pass therein. The greatest and the smallest events were equally predetermined; in particular, all the thoughts, all the words, all the actions of every child of man; all that every man thinks, or speaks, or does, from his birth, till his spirit returns to God that gave it. It follows, that no man can do either more or less good, or more or less evil, than he does. None can think, speak, or act any otherwise than he does, not in any the smallest circumstance. In all he is bound by an invisible, but more than adamantine, chain. No man can move his head or foot, open or shut his eyes, lift his hand, or stir a finger, any otherwise than as God determined he should, from all eternity."

8. That this chain is invisible, they allow; man himself perceives nothing of it. He suspects nothing less; he imagines himself to be free in all his actions; he seems to move hither and thither, to go this way or that, to choose doing evil or doing good, just at his own discretion. But all this is an entire mistake; it is no more than a pleasing dream: For all his ways are fixed as the pillars of heaven; all unalterably determined. So that, notwithstanding these gay, flattering appearances,

In spite of all the labour we create,
We only row; but we are steer'd by fate!

9. A late writer, in his celebrated book upon free-will, explains the matter thus: "The soul is now connected with a material vehicle, and placed in the material world. Various objects here continually strike upon one or other of the bodily organs. These communicate the impression to the brain; consequent on which such and such sensations follow. These are the materials on which the understanding works, in forming all its simple and complex ideas; according to which our judgments are formed. And according to our judgments are our passions; our love and hate, joy and sorrow, desire and fear, with their innumerable combinations. Now, all these passions together are the will, variously modified; and all actions flowing from the will are voluntary actions; consequently, they are good or evil, which otherwise they could not be. And yet it is not in man to direct his own way, while he is in the body, and in the world."

10. The author of an "Essay on Liberty and Necessity," published some years since at Edinburgh, speaks still more explicitly, and endeavours to trace the matter to the foundation: "The impressions," says he, "which man receives in the natural world, do not correspond to the truth of things. Thus the qualities called secondary, which we by natural instinct attribute to matter, belong not to matter, nor exist without us; but all the beauty of colours with which heaven and earth appear clothed, is a sort of romance or illusion. For in external objects there is really no other distinction, but that of the size and arrangement of their constituent parts, whereby the rays of light are variously reflected and refracted." (Page 152, &c.)

"In the moral world, whatever is a cause with regard to its proper effect, is an effect with regard to some prior cause, and so backward without end. Events, therefore, being a train of causes and effects, are necessary and fixed. Every one must be, and cannot be otherwise than it is." (Page 157, &c.)

"And yet a feeling of an opposite kind is deeply rooted in our nature. Many things appear to us, as not predetermined by any invariable law. We naturally make a distinction, between things that must be, and things that may be, or may not.

"So with regard to the actions of men. We see that connexion between an action and its motive to be so strong, that we reason with full confidence concerning the future actions of others. But if actions necessarily arise from their

proper motives, then all human actions are necessary and fixed. Yet they do not appear so to us. Indeed, before any particular action, we always judge, that the action will be the necessary result of some motive. But afterwards the feeling instantly varies. We accuse and condemn a man for doing what is wrong. We conceive, he had a power of acting otherwise; and the whole train of our feelings suppose him to have been entirely a free agent.

“But what does this liberty amount to? In all cases, our choice is determined by some motive. It must be determined by that motive which appears the best upon the whole. But motives are not under our power or direction. When two motives offer, we have not the power of choosing as we please. We are necessarily determined.

“Man is passive in receiving impressions of things; according to which the judgment is necessarily formed. This the will necessarily obeys, and the outward action necessarily follows the will.

“Hence it appears, that God decrees all future events. He who gave such a nature to his creatures, and placed them in such circumstances, that a certain train of actions must necessarily follow; he who did so, and who must have foreseen the consequences, did certainly decree, that those events should fall out, and that men should act just as they do.

“The Deity is the First Cause of all things. He formed the plan on which all things were to be governed, and put it in execution by establishing, both in the natural and moral world, certain laws that are fixed and immutable. By virtue of these, all things proceed in a regular train of causes and effects, bringing about the events contained in the original plan, and admitting the possibility of no other. This universe is a vast machine, wound up and set a-going. The several springs and wheels act unerringly one upon another. The hand advances and the clock strikes, precisely as the Artist has determined. In this plan, man, a rational creature, was to fulfil certain ends. He was to appear as an actor, and to act with consciousness and spontaneity. Consequently, it was necessary he should have some idea of liberty, some feeling of things possible and contingent, things depending on himself, that he might be led to exercise that activity for which he was designed. To have seen himself a part of that great machine would have been altogether incongruous to

the ends he was to fulfil. Had he seen that nothing was contingent, there would have been no room for forethought, nor for any sort of industry or care. Reason could not have been exercised in the way it is now; that is, man could not have been man. But now, the moment he comes into the world, he acts as a free agent. And contingency, though it has no real existence in things, is made to appear as really existing. Thus is our natural feeling directly opposite to truth and matter of fact; seeing it is certainly impossible, that any man should act any otherwise than he does."

See necessity drawn at full length, and painted in the most lively colours!

II. 1. It is easy to observe, that every one of these schemes implies the universal necessity of human actions. In this they all agree, that man is not a free but a necessary agent, being absolutely determined in all his actions by a principle exterior to himself. But they do not agree what that principle is. The most ancient of them, the Manichæan, maintained, that men are determined to evil by the evil god, Arimanius; that Oromasdes, the good God, would have prevented or removed that evil, but could not; the power of the evil god being so great, that he is not able to control it.

2. The Stoics, on the other hand, did not impute the evil that is in the world to any intelligent principle, but either to the original stubbornness of matter, which even divine power was not capable of removing; to the concatenation of causes and effects, which no power whatever could alter; or to unconquerable fate, to which they supposed all the gods, the Supreme not excepted, to be subject.

3. The author of two volumes, entitled "Man," rationally rejects all the preceding schemes, while he deduces all human actions from those passions and judgments which, during the present union of the soul and body, necessarily result from such and such vibrations of the fibres of the brain. Herein he indirectly ascribes the necessity of all human actions to God; who, having fixed the laws of this vital union according to his own good pleasure, having so constituted man that the motions of the soul thus depend on the fibres of the body, has thereby laid him under an invincible necessity of acting thus, and in no other manner. So do those likewise, who suppose all the judgments and passions necessarily to flow from the motion of the blood and spirits. For

this is indirectly to impute all our passions and actions to Him who alone determined the manner wherein our blood and spirits should move.

4. The gentleman next mentioned does this directly, without any softening or circumlocution at all. He flatly and roundly affirms, The Creator is the proper Author of everything which man does ; that by creating him thus, he has absolutely determined the manner wherein he shall act ; and that therefore man can no more help sinning, than a stone can help falling. The Assembly of Divines do as directly ascribe the necessity of human actions to God, in affirming that God has eternally determined whatsoever shall be done in time. So likewise does Mr. Edwards of New-England ; in proving by abundance of deep, metaphysical reasoning, that “we *must* see, hear, taste, feel the objects that surround us, and *must* have such judgments, passions, actions, and no other.” He flatly ascribes the necessity of all our actions to Him who united our souls to these bodies, placed us in the midst of these objects, and ordered that these sensations, judgments, passions, and actions should spring therefrom.

5. The author last cited connects together and confirms all the preceding schemes ; particularly those of the ancient Stoics and the modern Calvinists.

III. 1. It is not easy for a man of common understanding, especially if unassisted by education, to unravel these finely-woven schemes, or show distinctly where the fallacy lies. But he knows, he feels, he is certain, they cannot be true ; that the holy God cannot be the author of sin. The horrid consequences of supposing this may appear to the meanest understanding, from a few plain, obvious considerations, of which every man that has common sense may judge.

If all the passions, the tempers, the actions of men, are wholly independent on their own choice, are governed by a principle exterior to themselves, then there can be no moral good or evil ; there can be neither virtue nor vice, neither good nor bad actions, neither good nor bad passions or tempers. The sun does much good ; but it is no virtue ; but he is not capable of moral goodness. Why is he not ? For this plain reason, because he does not act from choice. The sea does much harm : It swallows up thousands of men ; but it is not capable of moral badness, because it does not act by choice, but from a necessity of nature. If indeed one or the other

can be said to act at all. Properly speaking, it does not : It is purely passive : It is only acted upon by the Creator ; and must move in this manner and no other, seeing it cannot resist His will. In like manner, St. Paul did much good : But it was no virtue, if he did not act from choice. And if he was in all things necessitated to think and act, he was not capable of moral goodness. Nero does much evil ; murders thousands of men, and sets fire to the city : But it is no fault ; he is not capable of moral badness, if he does not act from choice, but necessity. Nay, properly, the man does not act at all : He is only acted upon by the Creator, and must move thus, being irresistibly impelled. For who can resist his will ?

2. Again : If all the actions, and passions, and tempers of men are quite independent on their own choice, are governed by a principle exterior to themselves ; then none of them is either rewardable or punishable, is either praise or blameworthy. The consequence is undeniable : I cannot praise the sun for warming, nor blame the stone for wounding me ; because neither the sun nor the stone acts from choice, but from necessity. Therefore, neither does the latter deserve blame, nor the former deserve praise. Neither is the one capable of reward, nor the other of punishment. And if a man does good as necessarily as the sun, he is no more praiseworthy than that ; if he does evil as necessarily as the stone, he is no more blameworthy. The dying to save your country is noway rewardable, if you are compelled thereto ; and the betraying your country is noway punishable, if you are necessitated to do it.

3. It follows, if there be no such thing as virtue or vice, as moral good or evil, if there be nothing rewardable or punishable in the actions or passions of men, then there can be no judgment to come, and no future rewards and punishments. For might not God as well judge the trees of the wood, or the stones of the field, as man, if man was as totally passive as they ? as irresistibly determined to act thus or thus ? What should he be commended or rewarded for, who never did any good but when he could not help it, being impelled thereto by a force which he could not withstand ? What should he be blamed or punished for, who never did any evil, to which he was not determined by a power he could no more resist, than he could shake the pillars of heaven ?

This objection the author of the *Essay* gives in its full strength : "The advocates for liberty reason thus : If actions

be necessary, and not in our own power, what ground is there for blame, self-condemnation, or remorse? If a clock were sensible of its own motions, and knew that they proceeded according to necessary laws, could it find fault with itself for striking wrong? Would it not blame the artist, who had so ill adjusted the wheels? So that, upon this scheme, all the moral constitution of our nature is overturned; there is an end to all the operations of conscience, about right and wrong; man is no longer a moral agent, nor the subject of praise or blame for what he does."

He strangely answers: "Certainly the pain, the remorse, which is felt by any man who had been guilty of a bad action, springs from the notion, that he has a power over his own actions, that he might have forborne to do it. It is on this account, that he is angry at himself, and confesses himself to be blamable. That uneasiness proceeds on the supposition, that he is free, and might have acted a better part. And one under the dominion of bad passions is condemned upon this ground, that it was in his power to be free from them. Were not this the case, brutes might be the objects of moral blame as well as man. But we do not blame them, because they have not freedom, a power of directing their own actions. We must therefore admit, that the idea of freedom is essential to the moral feeling. On the system of universal necessity, there could be no place for blame or remorse. And we struggle in vain to reconcile to this system the testimony which conscience clearly gives to freedom."

Is this an answer to the objection? Is it not fairly giving up the whole cause?

He adds: "A feeling of liberty, which I now scruple not to call deceitful, is interwoven with our nature. Man must be so constituted, in order to attain virtue." *To attain virtue!* Nay, you have yourself allowed, that, on this supposition, virtue and vice can have no being. You go on: "If he saw himself as he really is," (Sir, do not you see yourself so?) "if he conceived himself and all his actions necessarily linked into the great chain, which renders the whole order both of the natural and moral world unalterably determined in every article, what would follow?" Why, just nothing at all. The great chain must remain as it was before; since whatever you see or conceive, that it "unalterably determined in every article."

To confute himself still more fully, he says, "If we knew good and evil to be necessary and unavoidable," (contradiction in terms; but let it pass,) "there would be no more place for praise or blame; no indignation at those who had abused their rational powers; no sense of just punishment annexed to crimes, or of any reward deserved by good actions. All these feelings vanish at once, with the feeling of liberty. And the sense of duty must be quite extinguished: For we cannot conceive any moral obligation, without supposing a power in the agent over his own actions."

If so, what is he who publishes a book to show mankind that they have no power over their own actions?

To the objection, that this scheme "makes God the author of sin," the Essayist feebly answers: "Sin, or moral turpitude, lies in the evil intention of him that commits it, or in some wrong affection. Now, there is no wrong intention in God." What then? Whatever wrong intention or affection is in man, you make God the direct author of it. For you flatly affirm, "Moral evil cannot exist, without being permitted of God. And with regard to a first cause, permitting is the same thing as causing." That I totally deny: But if it be, God is the proper cause of all the sin in the universe.

4. Suppose, now, the Judge of all the earth,—having just pronounced the awful sentence, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,"—should say to one on the left hand, "What canst thou offer in thy own behalf?" Might he not, on this scheme, answer, "Lord, why am I doomed to dwell with everlasting burnings? For not doing good? Was it ever in my power to do any good action? Could I ever do any, but by that grace which thou hadst determined not to give me? For doing evil? Lord, did I ever do any, which I was not bound to do by thy own decree? Was there ever a moment when it was in my power, either to do good, or to cease from evil? Didst not thou fix whatever I should do, or not do, or ever I came into the world? And was there ever one hour, from my cradle to my grave, wherein I could act otherwise than I did?" Now, let any man say whose mouth would be stopped, that of the criminal or the Judge.

5. But if, upon this supposition, there can be no judgment to come, and no future rewards or punishments, it likewise follows, that the Scriptures, which assert both, cannot be of

divine original. If there be not "a day wherein God will judge the world, by that Man whom he hath appointed;" if the wicked shall not go into eternal punishment, neither the righteous into life eternal; what can we think of that book which so frequently and solemnly affirms all these things? We can no longer maintain, that "all Scripture was given by inspiration of God," since it is impossible that the God of truth should be the author of palpable falsehoods. So that, whoever asserts the pre-determination of all human actions, a doctrine totally inconsistent with the scriptural doctrines of a future judgment, heaven and hell, strikes hereby at the very foundation of Scripture, which must necessarily stand or fall with them.

6. Such absurdities will naturally and necessarily follow from the scheme of necessity. But Mr. Edwards has found out a most ingenious way of evading this consequence: "I grant," says that good and sensible man, "if the actions of men were involuntary, the consequence would inevitably follow,—they could not be either good or evil; nor, therefore, could they be the proper object either of reward or punishment. But here lies the very ground of your mistake; their actions are not involuntary. The actions of men are quite voluntary; the fruit of their own will. They love, they desire, evil things; therefore they commit them. But love and hate, desire and aversion, are only several modes of willing. Now, if men voluntarily commit theft, adultery, or murder, certainly the actions are evil, and therefore punishable. And if they voluntarily serve God, and help their neighbours, the actions are good, and therefore rewardable."

7. I cannot possibly allow the consequence, upon Mr. Edwards's supposition. Still I say, if they are necessitated to commit robbery or murder, they are not punishable for committing it. But you answer, "Nay, their actions are voluntary, the fruit of their own will." If they are, yet that is not enough to make them either good or evil. For their will, on your supposition, is irresistibly impelled; so that they cannot help willing thus or thus. If so, they are no more blamable for that will, than for the actions which follow it. There is no blame if they are under a necessity of willing. There can be no moral good or evil, unless they have liberty as well as will, which is entirely a different thing. And the not advertising to this seems to be the direct occasion of Mr. Edwards's whole mistake.

8. God created man an intelligent being; and endued him with will as well as understanding. Indeed, it seems, without this, his understanding would have been given to no purpose. Neither would either his will or understanding have answered any valuable purpose, if liberty had not been added to them, a power distinct from both; a power of choosing for himself, a self-determining principle. It may be doubted whether God ever made an intelligent creature without all these three faculties; whether any spirit ever existed without them; yea, whether they are not implied in the very nature of a spirit. Certain it is, that no being can be accountable for its actions, which has not liberty, as well as will and understanding.

How admirably is this painted by Milton, supposing God to speak concerning his new-made creature!—

“ I made him just and right,
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
 Such I created all the' ethereal powers,—
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
 Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
 Of true allegiance, constant faith and love,
 Where only what they needs must do appear'd,
 Not what they would? What praise could they receive,
 What pleasure I, from such obedience paid,
 When will and reason, (reason also is choice,)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,
 Made passive both, had served necessity,
 Not me? They therefore, as to right belong'd,
 So were created—
 So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
 Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
 They trespass, authors to themselves in all
 Both what they judge and what they choose: For so
 I form'd them free; and free they must remain,
 Till they enthral themselves. I else must change
 Their nature, and reverse the high decree,
 Unchangeable, eternal, which ordain'd
 Their freedom; they themselves ordain'd their fall.”

Paradise Lost, Book III.

9. It seems, they who divide the faculties of the human soul into the understanding, will, and affections, unless they make the will and affections the same thing; (and then how inaccurate is the division!) must mean by affections, the will, properly speaking, and by the term *will*, neither more nor less than *liberty*; the power of choosing either to do or not to do, (commonly called liberty of contradiction,) or to do this

or the contrary, good or evil (commonly called liberty of contrariety). Without the former at least, there can be nothing good or evil, rewardable or punishable. But it is plain, the doctrine of necessity, as taught either by ancient Heathens, or by the moderns, (whether Deists or Christians,) destroys both, leaves not a shadow of either, in any soul of man: Consequently, it destroys all the morality of human actions, making man a mere machine; and leaves no room for any judgment to come, or for either rewards or punishments.

IV. 1. But whatever be the consequences deducible from this, that all human actions are necessary, how will you answer the arguments which are brought in defence of this position? Let us try whether something of this kind may not be done in a few words.

Indeed, as to the first scheme, that of the Manichees, the maintainers of a good and an evil god, though it was formerly espoused by men of renown, St. Augustine in particular; yet it is now so utterly out of date, that it would be lost labour to confute it. A little more plausible is this scheme of the Stoics', building necessity upon fate, upon the insuperable stubbornness of matter, or the indissoluble chain of causes and effects. Perhaps they invented this scheme to exculpate God, to avoid laying the blame upon him, by allowing He would have done better if he could; that he was willing to cure the evil, but was not able. But we may answer them short, There is no fate above the Most High; that is an idle, irrational fiction. Neither is there anything in the nature of matter, which is not obedient to his word. The Almighty is able, in the twinkling of an eye, to reduce any matter into any form he pleases; or to speak it into nothing; in a moment to expunge it out of his creation.

2. The still more plausible scheme of Dr. Hartley, (and I might add, those of the two gentlemen above-mentioned, which nearly coincide with it,) now adopted by almost all who doubt of the Christian system, requires a more particular consideration, were it only because it has so many admirers. And it certainly contains a great deal of truth, as will appear to any that considers it calmly. For who can deny, that not only the memory, but all the operations of the soul, are now dependent on the bodily organs, the brain in particular? insomuch that a blow on the back part of the head (as frequent experience shows) may take away the understanding,

and destroy at once both sensation and reflection; and an irregular flow of spirits may quickly turn the deepest philosopher into a madman. We must allow likewise, that while the very power of thinking depends so much upon the brain, our judgments must needs depend thereon, and in the same proportion. It must be farther allowed, that, as our sensations, our reflections, and our judgments, so our will and passions also, which naturally follow from our judgments, ultimately depend on the fibres of the brain. But does all this infer the total necessity of all human actions? "I am sorry for it," says the Doctor; "but I cannot help it." I verily think I can. I think I can not only cut the knot, by showing (as above) the intolerable absurdities which this scheme implies; but fairly untie it, by pointing out just where the fallacy lies.

3. But first permit me to say a word to the author of the Essay. His grand reason for supposing all mankind in a dream, is drawn from analogy: "We are in a continual delusion as to the natural world; why not as to the moral?" Well; how does he prove, that we are in a continual delusion as to the natural world? Thus: "All the qualities which are termed secondary qualities, we by a natural instinct ascribe to matter. But it is a mere deceit. They do not belong to matter, neither exist without us."

As commonly as this is asserted, it is absolutely false, as will appear quickly.

You instance in colours, and confidently say, "All this beauty of colours, with which heaven and earth appear to be clothed, is a sort of romance or illusion. In external objects there is no other distinction but that of the size and arrangement of their constituent parts, whereby the rays of light are variously reflected or refracted."

But are those rays of light real? And do they exist without us? Certainly, as much as the sun does. And are the constituent parts of those objects real? Nobody questions it. But are they really of such a size, and arranged in such a manner? They are; and what will you infer from that? I infer, that colour is just as real as size or figure; and that all colours do as really exist without us, as trees, or corn, or heaven, or earth.

"But what do you mean by colour?" When I say, "That cloth is of a red colour," I mean its surface is so disposed as to reflect the red (that is, the largest) rays of light. When I say, "The sky is blue," I mean, it is so disposed as

to reflect the blue (that is, the smallest) rays of light. And where is the delusion here? Does not that disposition, do not those rays, as really exist, as either the cloth or the sky? And are they not as really reflected, as the ball in a tennis-court? It is true, that, when they strike upon my eye, a particular sensation follows in my soul. But that sensation is not colour; I know no one that calls it so. Colour therefore is a real material thing. There is no illusion in the case, unless you confound the perception with the thing perceived. And all other secondary qualities are just as real as figure or any other primary one. So you have no illusion in the natural world to countenance that you imagine to be in the moral. Wherever, therefore, this argument occurs, (and it occurs ten times over,)—"The natural world is all illusion; therefore, so is the moral,"—it is just good for nothing.

But, take it all together, and what a supposition is this! Is it not enough to make one's blood run cold? "The great God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Father of the spirits of all flesh, the God of truth, has encompassed with falsehood every soul that he has made! has given up all mankind 'to a strong delusion,' to believe a lie! yea, all his creation is a lie; all the natural and all the moral world!" If so, you make God himself, rather than the devil, (horrid thought!) "the father of lies!" Such you doubtless represent him, when you say, not only that he has surrounded us with illusion on every side; but that the feelings which he has interwoven with our inmost nature are equally illusive!

That all these shadows, which for things we take,
Are but the empty dreams which in death's sleep we make!

And yet, after this, you make a feint of disputing in defence of a material world! Inconsistency all over! What proof have we of this, what possible proof can we have, if we cannot trust our own eyes, or ears, or any or all of our senses? But it is certain I can trust none of my senses, if I am a mere machine. For I have the testimony of all my outward and all my inward senses, that I am a free agent. If therefore I cannot trust them in this, I can trust them in nothing. Do not tell me there are sun, moon, and stars, or that there are men, beasts, or birds, in the world. I cannot believe one tittle of it, if I cannot believe what I feel in myself, namely, that it depends on me, and no other being, whether I shall now open or shut my eyes, move my head hither and thither,

or stretch my hand or my foot. If I am necessitated to do all this, contrary to the whole both of my inward and outward senses, I can believe nothing else, but must necessarily sink into universal scepticism.

Let us now weigh the main argument on which this author builds the melancholy hypothesis of necessity: "Actions necessarily arise from their several motives: Therefore, all human actions are necessary." Again: "In all cases the choice must be determined by that motive which appears the best upon the whole. But motives are not under our power. Man is passive in receiving impressions of things, according to which the last judgment is necessarily formed. This the will necessarily obeys, and the outward action necessarily follows the will."

Let us take this boasted argument in pieces, and survey it part by part. (1.) "Motives are not under our power." This is not universally true: Some are, some are not. That man has a strong motive to run his neighbour through, namely, violent anger; and yet the action does not necessarily follow. Often it does not follow at all; and where it does, not necessarily: He might have resisted that motive. (2.) "In all cases the choice must be determined by that motive which appears the best upon the whole." This is absolutely false. It is flatly contrary to the experience of all mankind. Who may not say on many occasions, *Video meliora?** I know what I do, is not "best upon the whole?" (3.) "Man is passive in receiving the impressions of things." Not altogether. Even here much depends on his own choice. In many cases he may or may not receive the impression; in most he may vary it greatly. (4.) "According to these his last judgment is necessarily formed." Nay, this too depends much upon his choice. Sometimes his first, sometimes his last, judgment, is according to the impressions which he has received; and frequently it is not. (5.) "This the will necessarily obeys." Indeed it does not. The mind has an intrinsic power of cutting off the connexion between the judgment and the will. (6.) "And the outward action necessarily follows the will." Not so. The thing I would, I do not; and the thing I would not, that I do. Whatever then becomes of the chain of events, this chain of argument has not one good link belonging to it.

* This quotation from Ovid is thus translated by Tate:—

"I see my error, yet to ruin move."—EDIT.

4. But allowing all he contends for,—that upon such vibrations of the brain, such sensations directly follow, and indirectly, as the various combinations and results of them, all our judgments and passions, and consequently words and actions; yet this infers no necessity at all, if there be a God in the world. Upon this the whole matter turns. And,

“This circumstance the Doctor had forgot.” And so indeed have almost the whole tribe of modern philosophers. They do not at all take God into their account; they can do their whole business without him. But in truth this their wisdom is their folly; for no system, either of morality or philosophy, can be complete, unless God be kept in view, from the very beginning to the end. Every true philosopher will surely go at least as far as the poor heathen poet:—

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχόμεθα, καὶ ἐν Διὶ λήγεται Μῶσαι.

“Muses, begin and end with God supreme!”

Now, if there be a God, he cannot but have all power over every creature that he has made. He must have equal power over matter and spirits, over our souls and bodies. What are then all the vibrations of the brain to him? or all the natural consequences of them? Suppose there be naturally the strongest concatenation of vibrations, sensations, reflections, judgments, passions, actions; cannot He, in a moment, whenever and however He pleases, destroy that concatenation? Cannot he cut off, or suspend, in any degree, the connexion between vibrations and sensations, between sensations and reflections, between reflections and judgments, and between judgments and passions or actions? We cannot have any idea of God’s omnipotence, without seeing He can do this if he will.

5. “If he will,” you may say, “we know he can. But have we any reason to think he will?” Yes; the strongest reason in the world, supposing that God is love; more especially, suppose he “is loving to every man,” and that “his mercy is over all his works.” If so, it cannot be, that he should see the noblest of his creatures under heaven necessitated to evil, and incapable of any relief but from himself, without affording that relief. It is undeniable, that he has fixed in man, in every man, his umpire, conscience; an inward judge, which passes sentence both on his passions and actions, either approving or condemning them. Indeed it has not

power to remove what it condemns; it shows the evil which it cannot cure. But the God of power can cure it; and the God of love will, if we choose he should. But he will no more necessitate us to be happy, than he will permit anything beneath the sun to lay us under a necessity of being miserable. I am not careful therefore about the flowing of my blood and spirits, or the vibrations of my brain; being well assured, that, however my spirits may flow, or my nerves and fibres vibrate, the Almighty God of love can control them all, and will (unless I obstinately choose vice and misery) afford me such help, as, in spite of all these, will put it into my power to be virtuous and happy for ever.

GLASGOW,
May 14, 1774.
