
A THOUGHT ON NECESSITY.

I. 1. THE late ingenious Dr. Hartley, in his "Essay on Man," resolves all thought into vibrations of the brain. When any of the fine fibres of the brain are moved, so as to vibrate to and fro, then (according to his scheme) a perception or sensation is the natural consequence. These sensations are at first simple, but are afterwards variously compounded; till, by farther vibrations, ideas of reflection are added to ideas of sensation. By the additional vibrations of this curious organ our judgments of things are also formed; and from the same fruitful source arise our reasonings in their endless variety.

2. From our apprehensions of things, from our judgments and reasonings concerning them, all our passions arise; whether those which are more sudden and transient, or those of a permanent nature. And from the several mixtures and modifications of these, our tempers or dispositions flow; very nearly, if not altogether, the same with what are usually termed virtues or vices.

3. Our passions and tempers are the immediate source of all our words and actions. Of consequence, these likewise depending on our passions, and our passions on our judgments and

apprehensions, all our actions, passions, and judgments are ultimately resolvable into the vibrations of the brain. And all of them together follow each other in one connected chain.

4. "But you will say," (says the Doctor,) "This infers the universal necessity of human actions. I am sorry for it; but I cannot help it." But since he saw, this destroyed that very essence of morality, leaving no room for either virtue or vice, why did he publish it to the world? Why? Because his brain vibrated in such a manner, that he could not help it.

Alas for poor human nature! If this is so, where is "the dignity of man?"

II. 1. But other great men totally disapprove of the doctrine of vibration. They give an entirely different account of this whole affair. They say, the delicate, soft, and almost fluid substance, of which the brain is composed, is absolutely incapable of such vibrations as the Doctor ascribes to it; but that the animal spirits, whatever they are, continually moving through that soft substance, naturally form various traces therein; first, very simple, then less or more compounded; that these are afterward varied innumerable ways; and that from these simple or compounded traces arise simple or compounded ideas, whether of sensation or reflection. From these result the judgments we form, with all our train of reasonings; and, at a little farther remove, our passions, our tempers, and from these our words and actions.

2. It is easy to observe, that this scheme equally infers the universal necessity of human actions. The premises indeed are a little different, but the conclusion is one and the same. If every thought, word, and action necessarily depends upon those traces in the brain, which are formed whether we will or no, without either our consent or knowledge; then the man has no more liberty in thinking, speaking, or acting, than the stone has in falling.

III. That great man, President Edwards, of New-England, places this in a still stronger light. He says,—

1. The whole frame of this world wherein we are placed is so constituted, that, without our choice, visible objects affect our eyes, sounds strike upon the ear, and the other things which surround us affect the other bodily organs, according to their several natures.

2. The nerves, which are spread all over the body, without any choice of ours, convey the impression made on the out-

ward organ to the common sensory; supposed to be lodged either in the pineal gland, or in some other part of the brain.

3. Immediately, without our choice, the perception or sensation follows: And from this,

4. The simple apprehension, (analogous to sensation,) which furnishes us with simple ideas.

5. These ideas are more and more associated together, still without our choice; and we understand, judge, reason accordingly; yca, love, hate, joy, grieve, hope, or fear.

6. And according to our passions we speak and act. Where is liberty then? It is excluded. All you see, is one connected chain, fixed as the pillars of heaven.

IV. To the same effect, though with a little variation, speaks the ingenious Lord Kames. He says,—

The universe is one immense machine, one amazing piece of clock-work, consisting of innumerable wheels fitly framed, and indissolubly linked together. Man is one of these wheels, fixed in the middle of this vast automaton. And he moves just as necessarily as the rest, as the sun or moon, or earth. Only with this difference, (which was necessary for completing the design of the great Artificer,) that he seems to himself perfectly free; he imagines that he is unnecessitated, and master of his own motion; whereas in truth he no more directs or moves himself, than any other wheel in the machine.

The general inference then is still the same; the point which all these so laboriously eudeavour to prove is, that inevitable necessity governs all things, and men have no more liberty than stones.

V. 1. But allowing all this; allowing (in a sense) all that Dr. Hartley, Edwards, and their associates contend for; what discovery have they made? What new thing have they found out? What does all this amount to? With infinite pains, with immense parade, with the utmost ostentation of mathematical and metaphysical learning, they have discovered just as much as they might have found in one single line of the Bible.

“Without me ye can do nothing!” absolutely, positively nothing! seeing, in Him all things live and move, as well as have their being; seeing, he is not only the true *primum mobile*, containing the whole frame of creation, but likewise the inward, sustaining, acting principle, indeed the only proper agent in the universe; unless so far as he imparts a spark of

his active, self-moving nature to created spirits. But more especially "ye can do nothing" right, nothing wise, nothing good, without the direct, immediate agency of the First Cause.

2. Let the trial be made. And First, what can reason, all-sufficient reason, do in this matter? Let us try, upon Dr. Hartley's scheme. Can it prevent or alter the vibrations of the brain? Can it prevent or alter the various compositions of them? or cut off the connexion between these, and our apprehensions, judgments, reasonings? or between these and our passions? or that between our passions, and our words and actions? Not at all. Reason can do nothing in this matter. In spite of all our reason, nature will keep its course, will hold on its way, and utterly bear down its feeble opponent.

3. And what can reason do, upon the second supposition? Can it prevent or alter the traces in the brain? Not a jot more than it could the vibrations. They laugh at all its power. Can it cut off the connexion between those traces and our apprehensions; or that between our apprehensions and our passions; or between our passions and actions? Nothing at all of this. It may see the evil, but it cannot help it.

4. Try what reason can do, upon the third supposition, that of President Edwards. Can it change the appearances of the things that surround us? or the impression which the nerves convey to the common sensory? or the sensation that follows? or the apprehension? Or can it cut off the connexion between our apprehensions of things and our passions? or that between our passions and our actions? Poor, impotent reason! It can do neither more nor less in any of these matters. It cannot alter the outward constitution of things; the nature of light, sound, or the other objects that surround us. It cannot prevent their affecting our senses thus and thus. And then, will not all the rest follow?

5. Make a trial, if reason can do any more, upon Lord Kames's supposition. Can it in any degree alter the nature of the universal machine? Can it change or stop the motion of any one wheel? Utterly impossible.

6. Has free-will any more power in these respects than reason? Let the trial be made upon each of these schemes.

What can it do upon Dr. Hartley's scheme? Can our free-will alter one vibration of the brain? What can it do

upon the second scheme? Can it erase or alter one of the traces formed there? What can it do upon Mr. Edwards's? Can it alter the appearances of the things that surround us? or the impressions they make upon the nerves? or the natural consequences of them? Can it do anything more on Lord Kames's scheme? Can it anyways alter the constitution of the great clock? Stand still! Look awhile into your own breast! What can your will do in any of these matters? Ah, poor free-will! Does not plain experience show, it is as impotent as your reason? Let it stand then as an eternal truth, "Without me ye can do nothing."

VI. 1. But in the same old book there is another word: "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me." Here the charm is dissolved! The light breaks in, and the shadows flee away.

One of these sentences should never be viewed apart from the other: Each receives light from the other. God hath joined them together, and let no man put them asunder.

Now, taking this into the account, I care not one pin for all Dr. Hartley can say of his vibrations. Allowing the whole which he contends for, allowing all the links of his mathematical chain to be as indissolubly joined together as are the propositions in Euclid; suppose vibrations, perceptions, judgments, passions, tempers, actions, ever so naturally to follow each other: What is all this to the God of nature? Cannot he stop, alter, annihilate any or all of these, in whatever manner, and in whatever moment he pleases? Away then with all these fine-wrought speculations! Sweep them off as a spider's web! Scatter them in the wind! How helpless soever they may be "who are without God in the world;" however they may groan under the iron hand of dire necessity; necessity has no power over those "who have the Lord for their God." Each of these can say, through happy experience, "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me."

2. Again: Allowing all the minute philosophers can say, of the traces formed in the brain, and of perceptions, judgments, passions, tempers, words, and actions naturally flowing therefrom: Whatever dreadful consequences may follow from hence, with regard to those who know not God, who have only natural reason and free-will to oppose the power of nature; (which we know to have no more force than a thread

of tow that has touched the fire;) under the influence of the God of nature, we laugh all our enemies to scorn. He can alter or efface all these traces in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Still, although "without Him I can do nothing," "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me."

3. Yet again: Let Mr. Edwards say all he will or can, concerning the outward appearances of things, as giving rise to sensations, association of ideas, passions, dispositions, and actions; allowing this to be the course of nature: What then? See One superior to nature! What is the course of nature to Him? By a word, a nod, he turneth it upside down!

His power inverted Nature owns,
Her only law his sov'reign word.

Let your chain be wrought ever so firm; He nods, and it flies in pieces; He touches it, and all the links fall asunder, as unconnected as the sand.

4. Once more: After Lord Kames has said all he pleases concerning the grand machine of the universe, and concerning the connexion of its several wheels, yet it must be allowed, He that made it can unmake it; can vary every wheel, every spring, every movement, at his own good pleasure. Neither, therefore, does this imply any necessity laid either upon the thoughts, passions, or actions, of those that know and trust in Him who is the Creator and Governor of heaven and earth.

5. Ah, poor Infidel! this is no comfort to you! You must plunge on in the fatal whirlpool! You are without hope; without help! For there is only one possible help; and that you spurn. What follows then? Why

*Si figit adamantinos
Summis verticibus dira neccitas
Clavos; non animum metu,
Non mortis laqueis expedies caput.**

O what advantage has a Christian (a real Christian) over an Infidel! He sees God! Consequently

* This quotation from Horace is thus translated by Francis:—

"Yet soon as Fate shall round your head,
With adamantine strength, its terrors spread,
Not the Dictator's power shall save
Your soul from fear, your body from the grave."—EDIT.

*Metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.*

He tramples on inexorable fate,
And fear, and death, and hell !

6. Ah, poor predestinarian ! If you are true to your doctrine, this is no comfort to you ! For perhaps you are not of the elect number : If so, you are in the whirlpool too. For what is your hope ? Where is your help ? There is no help for you in your God. *Your* God ! No ; he is not yours ; he never was ; he never will be. He that made you, He that called you into being, has no pity upon you ! He made you for this very end,—to damn you ; to cast you headlong into a lake of fire burning with brimstone ! This was prepared for you, or ever the world began ! And for this you are now reserved in chains of darkness, till the decree brings forth ; till, according to his eternal, unchangeable, irresistible will,

You groan, you howl, you writhe in waves of fire,
And pour forth blasphemies at his desire !

O God, how long shall this doctrine stand !



spirit of anger or resentment. I know well, “the wrath