
THOUGHTS UPON GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY.

God reveals himself under a two-fold character; as a Creator, and as Governor. These are no way inconsistent with each other; but they are totally different.

As a Creator, he has acted, in all things, according to his own sovereign will. Justice has not, cannot have, any place here; for nothing is due to what has no being. Here, therefore, he may, in the most absolute sense, do what he will with his own. Accordingly, he created the heavens and the earth, and all things that are therein, in every conceivable

respect, "according to his own good pleasure. 1. He began his creation at what time, or rather, at what part of eternity, it seemed him good. Had it pleased him, it might have been millions of years sooner, or millions of ages later. 2. He determined, by his sovereign will, the duration of the universe; whether it should last seven thousand, or seven hundred thousand, or numberless millions of years. 3. By the same, he appointed the place of the universe, in the immensity of space. 4. Of his sovereign will he determined the number of the stars, of all the component parts of the universe, and the magnitude of every atom, of every fixed star, every planet, and every comet. 5. As Sovereign, he

created the earth, with all the furniture of it, whether animate or inanimate; and gave to each such a nature, with such properties. 6. Of his own good pleasure, he made such a creature as man, an embodied spirit, and, in consequence of his spiritual nature, endued with understanding, will, and liberty. 7. He hath determined the times for every nation to come into being, with the bounds of their habitation. 8. He has allotted the time, the place, the circumstances, for the birth of each individual:—

If of parents I came
That honour'd thy name,
'Twas thy goodness appointed it so.

9. He has given to each a body, as it pleased him, weak or strong, healthy or sickly. This implies, 10. That he gives them various degrees of understanding, and of knowledge, diversified by numberless circumstances. It is hard to say how far this extends; what an amazing difference there is, as to the means of improvement, between one born and brought up in a pious English family, and one born and bred among the Hottentots. Only we are sure the difference cannot be so great, as to necessitate one to be good, or the other to be evil; to force one into everlasting glory, or the other into everlasting burnings. This cannot be, because it would suppose the character of God as a Creator, to interfere with God as a Governor; wherein he does not, cannot possibly, act according to his own mere sovereign will; but, as he has expressly told us, according to the invariable rules both of justice and mercy.

Whether therefore we can account for it or no, (which indeed we cannot in a thousand cases,) we must absolutely maintain, that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. But he cannot reward the sun for shining, because the sun is not a free agent. Neither could he reward us, for letting our light shine before men, if we acted as necessarily as the sun. All reward, as well as all punishment, pre-supposes free-agency; and whatever creature is incapable of choice, is incapable of either one or the other.

Whenever, therefore, God acts as a Governor; as a rewarder, or punisher, he no longer acts as a mere Sovereign, by his own sole will and pleasure; but as an impartial Judge, guided in all things by invariable justice.

Yet it is true, that, in some cases, mercy rejoices over justice; although severity never does. God may reward more, but he will never punish more, than strict justice requires. It may be allowed that God acts as Sovereign in convincing some souls of sin; arresting them in their mid career, by his resistless power. It seems also, that, at the moment of our conversion, he acts irresistibly. There may likewise be many irresistible touches during the course of our Christian warfare; with regard to which every believer may say,

" In the time of my distress
Thou hast my succour been,
In my utter helplessness
Restraining me from sin."

But still, as St. Paul might have been either obedient or "disobedient to the heavenly vision," so every individual may, after all that God has done, either improve his grace, or make it of none effect.

Whatever, therefore, it hath pleased God to do, of his sovereign pleasure, as Creator of heaven and earth; and whatever his mercy may do on particular occasions, over and above what justice requires; the general rule stands firm as the pillars of heaven: "The Judge of all the earth will do right. He will judge the world in righteousness," and every man therein, according to the strictest justice. He will punish no man for doing anything which he could not possibly avoid; neither for omitting anything which he could not possibly do. Every punishment supposes the offender might have avoided the offence for which he is punished: Otherwise, to punish him would be palpably unjust, and inconsistent with the character of God our Governor.

Let then these two ideas of God the Creator, the sovereign Creator, and God the Governor, the just Governor, be always kept apart. Let us distinguish them from each other, with the utmost care. So shall we give God the full glory of his sovereign grace, without impeaching his inviolable justice.