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ARTICLE I.

The Atonement. By the Rev. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER HODGE, D. D., Professor of Didactic, Historical, and Polemical Theology, in the Western Theological Seminary at Allegheny, Pa. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication. 440 pp., 12mo.

“We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

What is the gospel but the doctrine of Christ crucified, the doctrine of the cross? This is its central truth, on which all others depend, around which they revolve, without which they are vanity and confusion. This doctrine founded the Church. The Church has always believed it, and preached it, and lived by it, and drawn from it the inspiration of all its hopes, the strength of all its energies, and the secret of its triumphs. Without it Christianity and the Church are a folly and a lie.

But precisely against this doctrine—and that of course—human reason and pride and depravity, with deadliest hostility, have ever waged an implacable warfare. It has scandalised the Jew,

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ARTICLE V.

THE REVIEWER REVIEWED; OR, DR. ROSS ON
RIGHT AND WRONG, IN REVIEW OF MR. BARNES
ON FAITH IN GOD'S WORD.

In the year 1859, there was published by Mr. Barnes of Philadelphia, a work entitled *Inquiries and Suggestions in Regard to the Foundation of Faith in the Word of God*. It sets forth, in chapter first, nine "maxims or settled principles as bearing on a revelation from God," such as, that there is such a thing as truth; that there is that in man which responds to truth; that there is an essential and eternal distinction between right and wrong; that a revelation from God will not contradict any truth, however that truth is made known; that a pretended revelation, which should contradict established-truth, could not be received by mankind; and that a revelation will not, in its teachings, violate any of the constitutional principles of our nature. In chapter second, there is a discussion of reason, of the moral sense, and of science, as so many elements in judging of a revelation. The third chapter considers the appeal made by the Bible to reason and to conscience, and also the Bible in its relations to science. In the fourth and last chapter, the question is met: What is the foundation of faith in God's word? And the conclusion reached is thus expressed in the final paragraph, which we quote in full: "The sum of all, the result of all our inquiries, is this: The foundation of faith in God and in his word is, that GOD IS INFINITELY WISE, JUST, AND GOOD; not that he is an arbitrary Being, making evil good and good evil at his pleasure; not as having the right to reverse these things, if he should choose; not as having the power of making that right which is now wrong, or that wrong which is now right—that true which is now false, or that false which is now true—that crooked which is now straight, or that straight which is now crooked—that benevolent which is now malignant, and that malignant which is now benevolent; but the foundation

of confidence in God and his word is in the fact that there is an eternal distinction between right and wrong; that there are things that are right in themselves and things that are wrong in themselves; and that the character of God IS SO PERFECT THAT ALL THAT HE SAYS AND DOES, IS, AND WILL EVER BE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT IS ETERNALLY TRUE, AND RIGHT, AND BEST."

We confess that we have read this book of Mr. Barnes' with very great satisfaction. Some few statements and some expressions we would criticise; but, taking the book as a whole, it appears to us sound and good, as well as able and convincing. And we are decided and clear in the opinion that not half a score of our whole ministry and eldership would much object to the book, considered all in all; and that the last thing it would occur to them to charge against the work is *atheism*.

We are no champions of Mr. Barnes against the assaults of any one. He is nothing to us, more than any other New School Presbyterian minister of the whole body whose separation from our Church, thirty-odd years ago, filled us with devout thankfulness to God for so great a deliverance from the swelling tide of error. We know very well that Mr. Barnes has ever been a leader amongst his own brethren, and had, perhaps, as much to do as any man amongst them with the development of that new theology which led to the division in 1838. We do not forget how extremely offensive to the sound men of that day was his celebrated sermon on "The Way of Salvation." His "Commentary on the Romans" we remember as inculcating the most dangerous views upon the main points of our Calvinistic system. And we are therefore altogether unprepared to endorse any book put forth by him now, without careful examination. In particular, we express no opinion favorable to the lectures before the Union Theological Seminary of New York city, recently condemned by the Rev. Dr. Van Dyke of Brooklyn, which we have not had the opportunity to see. Nor are we disposed to defend the positions he has been understood by us to have taken years ago on the subject of slavery. But whereas the volume now under consideration bears upon slavery, we are free to say that, in our judgment, Mr. Barnes, *in this book*, says nothing

against slavery that is objectionable, *if slavery be understood (which, of course, it ought not to be) as he understands that word*; and whereas this book bears also upon the points concerning which Dr. Van Dyke criticises Mr. Barnes in his fourth letter to the Philadelphia *Presbyterian*, we feel free to say that, in our judgment, the positions of Mr. Barnes *in this volume* are such as no reasonable Presbyterian would censure, but must approve.

To be more explicit: The ninth maxim of Mr. Barnes is, that "*a revelation will not in its teachings violate the constitutional principles of our nature.*" He then states why he uses the word *constitutional*: "It refers to man as he came from God; to the nature with which he was originally endowed. It is designed to distinguish this from another sense in which the word 'nature' is sometimes employed now as referring to man, not as he *was*, but as he *is*. Using the term 'nature' in the largest sense, man has two natures—that in which he was made by his Creator, and that which refers to what he has become by his own act; that which belonged to him as a holy being, and that which belongs to him as a sinner." He proceeds to describe man in this "lapsed state," and with this "fallen nature;" and then he insists that "underlying all that is depraved and impure," there are still some indications of the original constitution of man. "There are accurate deductions of reason;" "just convictions of conscience;" "a moral sense, which approves of what is right, and disapproves what is wrong." "There is *something* in man which is the basis of appeals on the subject of morals." It is the original constitution of our minds to which he then declares that he insists no revelation from God can do violence. "It will be such as the conscience, under the highest teachings and in the most perfect state, will approve; it will be such as will commend itself to the moral sense of mankind, when that moral sense is developed in the best and most perfect forms. It will contain nothing which will be contradictory to either of these things. And if a pretended revelation *did* contain that which was a contradiction of these things, it could not be embraced by mankind." Page 34.

Now, we cannot see anything very bad in all this; on the contrary, it appears to us to be good and sound doctrine.

As to the subject of slavery, this book says: "Just in proportion as a professed revelation should be found to contain sentiments, or authorise acts, or lend its countenance to institutions, customs, or laws that violate the moral sense of mankind; that are contrary to the spirit of humanity; that impede the progress of society; that cramp and fetter the human powers; that are contrary to the best arrangements in the family relation, or that tend to debase and degrade mankind—just in that proportion will infidels be made to such a pretended revelation; for mankind will not receive a system as from heaven which violates the established principles of our nature. And hence it follows that all the defenders of a revelation, in proportion as they endeavor to show that it sanctions and sustains such institutions and customs, become the promoters of infidelity in the world, and are, to the extent of their influence and the success of their arguments, responsible for the infidelity that may prevail. A pretended revelation that, by its fair teaching, sustained oppression and wrong; that was the advocate of ignorance and barbarity; that fostered a spirit of revenge; that encouraged licentiousness; that advocated irresponsible power, or that placed slavery on the same basis as the relation of parent and child, husband and wife, guardian and ward—would so impinge on the great principles of our nature, and be so at war with the best interests of society, that the world could not ultimately receive it, and all who should endeavor to show that such a revelation *did* sustain and countenance such doctrines, would of necessity become the practical diffusers of infidelity in the world." Pp. 49, 50.

And in another place he says: "Nothing could convince the world at large that theft and piracy are right; nothing can convince the world at large that slavery is right; and if in a book of pretended revelation these things were sanctioned as right or enjoined as just, the book would ultimately be rejected by mankind." P. 170.

Now, what is to be censured in these utterances of Mr. Barnes' about slavery—what makes it somewhat difficult for us, as Southern Presbyterians and quondam slaveholders, to read with patience these utterances—is simply that they proceed upon a

false view of the facts about slavery. It is not the principles (for the most part just and true) here laid down by this writer to which we can object, but to his application of them to the system recently in existence amongst us, and defended by us then and now. The facts were not as this writer had been led to believe. Slavery was a good institution. It was not an oppressive, degrading, debasing institution, but quite the contrary. In about two centuries, it elevated barbarians and savages, four or five millions in number, into a partially civilised and Christian people. It was a kindly relation on both sides—especially was it good for the negro, as it protected him from that antagonism to the white race, and that consequent blight, decay, and ruin, which, it is to be feared, false friends and mistaken friends have recently conspired to precipitate upon him.

We said Mr. Barnes's principles respecting slavery were, for the most part, just and true. We except always his principles of Bible interpretation on this subject—according to which he was led to deny what is so patent on the very face of the record. He talks of the defenders of slavery as "promoters of infidelity." Let him look to it that this dreadful fault be not found lying at his own door; for what Christian can promote infidelity, if *he* does it not who wrests *the Bible forcibly and violently* to suit his own preconceived opinions?

We consider Mr. Barnes's book open to criticism in that he sometimes allows himself to put the distinction of right and wrong "*in the nature of things* or apart from the mere will of God." (See p. 67.) Dr. Paley defines "the nature of things" as meaning "the actual constitution of the world," and we suppose no one will object to the definition. But an actual constitution implies an actual constitutor. And so Mr. Barnes may, perhaps, legitimately defend his expression from the charge that it is atheistic. And yet it sounds like erecting a power separate from God and greater than God, when he sometimes allows himself to say that right and wrong are "*in the nature of things* or apart from the mere will of God." And inasmuch as no actual constitution of the world was or could be set up, apart from the will of God, and because we must conceive of the distinction of

right and wrong as antedating any actual constitution or nature of things, it is certainly a serious error to found this great and eternal moral distinction on any actual constitution whatever apart from God's will. And yet we think it is impossible for any one who considers fairly the whole scope and bearing of Mr. Barnes's book, to hold him responsible for the atheistic conclusion which might be forced out of the expression, if it were invariably and of set purpose so employed in this volume.

We have still another criticism. The whole discussion manifestly relates to *speculative* belief, and yet the title is "Inquiries and Suggestions in Regard to the Foundation of *Faith in the Word of God*." Mr. Barnes should perhaps have distinguished, even on his title page, betwixt true faith and that which is merely speculative." He should, at least, have made it indisputably plain, in the whole conduct of his argument, that he knows it is not reasoning nor proof which ever did or can of itself lead any man truly to believe. He should have manifested in every chapter, if not on every page, what appears no where, if we mistake not, throughout the volume, that not any nor all of his "maxims or settled principles which bear on a revelation," not reason, not the moral sense, not science as confirming the truth of the Scriptures, ever begot true faith in any human soul. All such appeals as these can produce only a cold, dead, inoperative assent to the claims of Christianity; whilst, on the other hand, thousands and millions of sinners have believed unto salvation without ever hearing a word about these "maxims," or having the advantage of any of these appeals. And yet very far are we from maintaining that Mr. Barnes's argument is a vain and unprofitable one. Very far are we from holding that the speculative faith he seeks to confirm by it is a useless thing. On the contrary, we hold that it may be, and often is, (as it has been said justly that even Gnosticism was in the first ages,) "a bridge to faith" for many souls, though deceiving more. Incomparably better as a condition for the general mind is even the merest speculative acceptance of the gospel than a state of blank and naked infidelity. Give us utter indifference and worldliness—which is, of course, practical infidelity—or give us superstition

in its most popish or in its most heathenish form, rather than icy scepticism, freezing the soul to death. There is hope that the slumbers of the worldling may be broken, and the strong religiousness of the superstitious be directed out of the wrong and into the right channel by the grace of God; but it is an almost hopeless condition for the human mind, when closing its eyes against evidence, it has deliberately rejected the Scriptures and profanely hardened itself into a denial of God and immortality.

The book which we have now for the most part earnestly commended, Dr. Ross, reviewing, condemns in the strongest terms—it is actually *atheistic*. Our opinion is, that his own errors are far more serious and important than any contained in Mr. Barnes's work. There are two points which come up in the course of this discussion. The first relates to the true foundation of the distinction between right and wrong; the second, to the part which reason may legitimately act in judging of the evidences of Christianity. The reviewer holds that right and wrong are made such by the absolute will of God. The writer whom he reviews holds that this is an essential and eternal distinction. So much for the first point. As to the second, the writer reviewed maintains that as there is such a thing as truth and right, essentially and eternally distinct from error and from wrong, so there is that in man's original nature which responds to truth; and there being in man some remains of his primeval constitution, his reason will respond to the truth of God revealed, and will recognise truth as from its own author and creator. Accordingly, he allows the appeal to reason as being in its proper sphere a legitimate judge of any professed revelation. The reviewer, on the other hand, if we understand him, disparages all such appeals to human reason; has no use for speculative belief, nor for moral philosophy; regards Satan as its first and latest teacher; and indiscriminately classes the wise men of Athens, the Gnostics, the early fathers, the scholastic divines, and all the teachers of philosophy since the Reformation, and also "all schools, all universities, all colleges, all lyceums, all books and tracts," as doing Satan's work. (Article II., pp. 215–24.) On both these points of dispute, we give our decided preference

to Mr. Barnes's views over those of his assailant. It is our solemn conviction that the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, during the whole course of its existence, from the beginning to the present time, has never admitted to its pages any such grievous errors against sound theology and morals as these two articles contain.

I. It may assist our readers to get a distinct view of what Dr. R. holds about right and wrong, if we cull from different portions of these articles his statements of the case, without the accompanying arguments, so as to present the matter briefly and in connected form. We shall give the Doctor's own Italics and capitals:

"God is the creator of all truth," Article I., p. 340. "Man, being the image of God, is the *maker of his ideas*," p. 341. "Man, like his Creator, spontaneously generates ideas, and makes them his in the same self-pleasure of his will," p. 346. "God makes one and one to be two," p. 341. "An axiom is divinely originated thought," p. 342. "And when He placed man under law in the relation then constituted between himself and his creatures, with his covenant of life and death, RIGHT and WRONG were then *first MADE to be* in the PLEASURE of his WILL; the thing commanded was right, because he willed it to be right; the thing commanded not to be was wrong, solely because he willed it to be wrong," p. 343. "Those ten relations," [referred to in the ten commandments,] "with their good and evil, were such in his mere pleasure," p. 343. "Heaven is of his pleasure; Hell is the infinite wisdom of his will," p. 344. "God's *nature* is, so to speak, without form and void until it is *will*," p. 345. "*God has freely and eternally CONCEIVED certain ideas, which HE MAKES TO BE TRUTH*," Art. II., p. 185. "God could (as to his mere power) have made the mind of man think infinitely differently from what it does, and to *hold any of its conceptions to be truth*," p. 188. "The Supreme Being has MADE himself to be just, and holy, and true, and good," p. 198. "He, by his will, determines from the beginning his mode of existence as THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY GHOST;" "God made himself to exist in a Trinity by act of his will," p. 204. "God even constitutes, by his voluntary act, the relations of the persons of the Godhead," p. 205.

Now, in the first place, the reader will notice in what strong terms God is here declared absolutely to make all the difference

there is between truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil. God *creates* all truth and all right. Man also *makes* truth, but God's making overrules man's; for God can and does *cause* man to think "and so make truth" in an infinitely different way from what he might and does think "and so make truth." But if man, the creator of truth, can be made to think infinitely different and opposite thoughts, much more must God, the absolute and free Creator of all distinctions, be able thus to think and so make opposite truths! "We must reason thus," says Dr. Ross, "because our notion of God is derived from his image in man." Art. II., p. 195. "If we try to conceive what God is at all, we must take the idea of what man is, and fill out the conception with attributes of infinite and eternal perfection. There is absolutely no other way to think of God, even by possibility, as a personal being." P. 203. We *must* therefore conceive that God might have thought error to be good and right, and truth evil and wrong; and that he might have made himself the opposite of the just, holy, true, and good God that he is! And so we must conceive that he might now cease to think and to be as he has thought and has been from all eternity, and become infinitely opposite to what he is and always has been! And we must, in like manner, conceive that he might, by a free voluntary act, put an end to the relation of the persons in the Godhead which he freely and voluntarily constituted; nay, cause himself no longer to exist in a trinity of persons at all!

The reader's mind must be constituted very differently from our own, if he can attentively consider all this and not be filled with horror. Should we be going any further, if in opposition to the plain teachings of Scripture, we should blasphemously declare that the God of truth can lie and the self-existent Jehovah cease to be?

It is not necessary to say much about the metaphysics involved in these statements concerning God's *creating* and man's *creating* truth. Truth which is created must *be*, and it is impossible to conceive of both God and man's creating and so causing truth to be; since, as the author confesses, the truths created by

man oftentimes do not agree with those created by God. Truth is one harmonious whole, and every truth must always consist with every other truth. Our author seems to be conscious of the difficulty into which his metaphysics have brought him; for in the earlier pages of Article II., we find him laboring to explain away this creating power of man. It is not seldom, indeed, that Dr. Ross's genius for speculation leads him astray. How can any person, not thus endowed equally with himself, digest such statements as this: "*God has freely and eternally conceived certain ideas, which he makes to be truth.*" Article II., p. 185. This is all vain speculation. The Scripture does not tell us that God first conceives his ideas and then makes them to be truth; and untaught by Scripture, what can any man know on such a subject? or what right has he thus to lay the mind of God on the Procrustean bed of his earth-born metaphysics? On page 343 of the first article occurs a similar speculation, which, it appears to us, is altogether unwarranted, where it is boldly asserted, and here also in capital letters, that before the creation of man and his coming under law, right and wrong existed not. Were there, then, no moral ideas amongst all the sons of God before Adam? And does this glorious moral distinction (which the Scriptures tell us, Exodus xv. 11, constitutes the very glory of Jehovah himself) depend on the existence of any creature, however exalted? When the Scriptures declare that God is glorious in holiness, that his holiness is his glory, who amongst human teachers is at liberty to assert that in the ineffable communion of the eternal Trinity there was no such idea known or felt as the idea of the right, the good, and the true? But it is not only in these few cases that our author seems to give the reins to his own speculative tendencies. This disposition in no ordinary measure is evinced all through these two articles. His readers generally, we doubt not, would be glad if he had only remembered his own strong denunciations against all philosophizing *as Satan's service*, when tempted himself to indulge in this kind of employment for his faculties. Surely there are not many of the philosophers who have been bolder or wilder. Few, indeed, have more adventurously spread the wings of their fancy

over the regions of thought not illuminated at all by the word of God.

The careful reader of Dr. Ross will observe, in the next place, that he sets out (Art. II., p. 186) with three hypotheses as possible, respecting the ground of moral distinctions: 1. His own—that that ground is *the will of God absolute and arbitrary*. 2. That that ground is *the nature of things*, which he pronounces to be “plain atheism.” 3. That that ground is *the nature of God* antecedent to his will, which he pronounces to be *modified atheism*; since, says he, it represents God as obeying an eternal law in his own nature. The reader will also observe, that in immediate connexion with the first hypothesis, it is asserted that “*truth*, as a thing believed, is wholly *mental conception*, idea in God and in man.” The author holds that “*truth*, as revealed to us from God, is * * * not fixed; but it is made by God to be contingent upon changing circumstances, which are always *his will*.” P. 187. Of course, this is quite consistent with its being only “a mental conception, an idea.” But how does it consist with truth’s being a created and of course existing thing? Nay, how does it consist with any stability whatever of the truth? Not only God’s own nature is thus made to be changeable, (while Scripture asserts that God changes not,) but also the very being of God is robbed of all certain permanence, as is also the threefold personal distinction in the Godhead. All these things are made to be not “fixed truths,” but mere “mental conceptions, mere ideas,” which may be unmade as freely and voluntarily as they were made. It appears to us that even the charge of atheism may be now retorted upon our author, for he ungodds the universe when he thus makes God’s nature and being both mere abstractions.

But beginning with three possible hypotheses, the author shortly dismisses the third one as not possible at all, and his conclusion is: “Right and wrong must be either in the nature of things distinct from the will of the Deity, or in that will supremely. There can be no third suggestion.” P. 200. And yet further on we read not only that the third suggestion is possible, but that it is even more dangerous than the second. For,

on page 230, three modes of stating atheism are given, and this one that God carries out in action what he thus perceives in his nature is said to be one of them, and to be "the most subtle and mischievous form of atheism; because, while it pretends to affirm belief in a PERSONAL JEHOVAH, it teaches the same unwilling law of things to be the eternal fact." We submit that there is a want of coherence in these several statements, which may well weaken the reader's confidence in the careful exactness of the author's thinking and utterance. We submit, also, that inasmuch as it is the commonly received doctrine amongst orthodox Christians that the distinction of right and wrong is grounded in God's own eternal and unchanging holy nature, there is some degree of arrogant presumption in the charge that this view is "the most subtle and dangerous form of atheism." Surely this writer does not really mean to say of his orthodox Christian brethren that they all "*pretend* to believe in a personal Jehovah," but are yet subtle 'atheists, and so hypocrites of the worst sort. The difficulty must be only in his way of conceiving and expressing his ideas.

We will not consent, therefore, to Dr. Ross's summary dismissal, on page 200, of the third hypothesis; but correcting and improving his statement of it, we shall insist upon that as the true theory of the case. God's command is not the *ground* of the moral difference of the actions of his responsible creatures, although it is indeed the *measure* of their obligation and the *rule* of their conduct. We must go back of that command to find that ground. It is not the command which makes the thing commanded to be right, but because it is right it is commanded by God. Whither, then, do we go back of God's command to find the foundation of this rightness of the thing commanded? Shall we go, as Dr. Ross says we needs must go, to the nature of things? No; for we cannot for a moment consent to put anything above God's will which is outside of himself. But we go to his own holy nature. He *is* necessarily, and he is *necessarily* holy. He cannot but *be*, and he cannot but *be* holy. His will is determined by his nature, and his nature is necessarily holy. And whatever is not conformed to this eternal and neces-

sary holiness of God, that is evil. Here is the true foundation of the distinction of right and wrong.

Dr. Ross, throughout this discussion, appropriates to himself the character and attitude of a disciple of the word, in opposition to what he regards as the rationalistic tendencies of Mr. Barnes; and yet it is a favorite idea with him, that "our notion of God is derived from his image in man." P. 195. For man was and is, "however now without divine life, the image of his Maker, as a spiritual being." P. 203. We do not deny the reasonableness of arguing, within moderate limits and in unmeasured terms, from man to God; but certainly Dr. Ross is as much a rationalist in employing this method of argumentation as Mr. Barnes can possibly be considered when he says that reason is in its sphere a legitimate judge of revelation. Mark how he insists that as to the nature of God in distinction from his will, "the inspired writers never speak of it at all. The word, in fact, occurs but once in the New Testament and not in a single instance in the Old." P. 203. But we make bold to assert, on the contrary, that it is from the Bible alone that we justly obtain all authoritative information respecting the nature of God. With reference, indeed, to the passage in 2 Peter i. 4, where he admits that the term "divine nature" occurs, Dr. R. draws the distinction of its referring to God's character and not to his essential nature—surely a needless and impertinent distinction here; for that nature of God in which moral distinctions are to be founded, must, of course, be his moral nature or character. He goes on to speak of "God's absolute silence as to his nature lying back of his will," from which God "gives us to understand that we shall believe there is nothing lying back of that will." P. 205. But we insist that God is very far from being silent about his own moral character or nature; for whatever may be the case about the *term* in the Scriptures, they certainly are full of the *thing*. They tell us God is light, and love, and a consuming fire to the Christless sinner. They tell us he is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, and that he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity. They record every possible mani-

festation of his holiness in his works of providence towards men and angels. Indeed, that God is of inflexible justice and immaculate holiness is one great and constant theme of all the sacred writers.

But to come still closer to the point in dispute. The Scriptures found the very commandments of God upon his nature. God says to Israel: "Be ye holy, for I am holy,"—not because such is my will. He says: "Thou shalt not bow down to graven images; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God,"—not because such is my will.

Thus, so far from God's being silent respecting his own nature, as though that were nothing and his will everything, we notice, in this and many other similar passages, how he often seems to take pains to set his nature forth to us by ascriptions to himself of the most powerful and terrible human passions—such as hatred and jealousy, wrath and revenge—and so makes plain to us, by terms which we can feel and understand, how opposed his nature is to everything that is evil.

There is a double error into which Dr. Ross has fallen in this whole discussion of the nature of God. On the one hand, he confounds the nature of God with the nature of things; and, on the other hand, separates too broadly between God's nature and his will. What he should join he divides, and what he should divide he joins together. As to the nature and will of God, they must not be set apart. His holy will is but his holy nature in action. God's will is holy; he commands what is good and forbids what is evil, because his nature is holy. But Dr. Ross places the foundation of moral distinctions in the mere will of God, and denies that it is found in that nature from whence his holy will must proceed. Nay, he declares that God's nature is without form and void until it is will. Art. I., page 345. And in Art. II., p. 203, he represents it as for "philosophers (wise above what is written)" to talk of the nature of God as "a something to be considered distinct from his will;" while "the inspired writers never speak" of the divine nature at all. So widely does he set apart what must not be disjoined. It appears to be his feeling that it dishonors the will of God to say that it

is based on his unchangeable eternal holy nature. But what more glorious foundation for the will even of Jehovah than his own nature—that holy nature which is as necessary to him as his being? If it is not dishonorable to the will of God to be dependent upon his necessary being, no more is it dishonorable to his will to be dependent on his necessary holiness.

On the other hand, Dr. Ross confounds together, in one aspect of them, the nature of God and the nature of things; for he can see no difference between them, considered as a foundation for right and wrong. In Art. II., p. 186, he declares that, so considered, the one is only plain and the other modified atheism. And in Art. I, p. 341, he even more strongly represents these views as “equally atheism.” Again, in Art. II., p. 230, he declares the view which founds the distinction of right and wrong in the nature of God to be the most subtle and mischievous form of atheism. When did Christian theologian ever utter anything at once so unsound and so extravagant?

Dr. Ross is a pupil of Paley. His notion of the arbitrary will of God as the source of all moral distinctions is derived from that most unsafe teacher of ethics. We shall satisfy the reader of the correctness of this allegation, and also adduce very high authority in condemnation of these false views, by appending in a note some paragraphs from the pen of Dr. Thornwell, originally published in this *Review*, Vol. VII., pp. 8–10.*

* “Is an action, then, right, simply because God commands it, and that upon pain of eternal death? Is it the *command* which makes it to be right, or is its being right the cause of the command? According to Dr. Paley, it is right *because* commanded. According to the common sense of mankind, it is commanded because it is right. If it is the will of God which creates the distinction between right and wrong, the difficulty which Dr. Paley felt, and which he has endeavored to obviate, would manifestly embarrass all our judgments in regard to the moral character of the divine administrations. ‘It *would* be an identical proposition to say of God that he acts right,’—a contradiction in terms to say that he could, by any possibility, *act wrong*. We cannot escape the conviction—it is forced upon us by the constitution of our nature—that there is a rectitude in actions, antecedently to any determinations of will, and that this rectitude is the formal cause of their authoritative injunction upon the part of God. To this

II. The second point of the discussion we are reviewing is the part which reason may legitimately act in judging of the evidences of Christianity. Some such part is on the one hand allowed, but on the other hand denied to her. The explanation of the difference we suppose to be that the parties are looking at different things. We have criticised Mr. Barnes for not making it perfectly plain, even on his title page, that his subject is not true saving faith—the work only of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man, but mere speculative belief—the offspring of the human understanding. Dr. Ross choosing to regard his antagonist as discussing the subject of saving faith, very unnecessarily occupies a large part of both his articles in showing the inefficacy

eternal standard we appeal when we vindicate the ways of God to man. We do not mean, as Dr. Paley suggests, when we pronounce the dispensations of Providence to be right, that they are merely consistent with themselves,—for that is the substance of his explanation,—but that they are consistent with a law which we feel to be co-extensive with intelligent existence. Right and wrong are not the creatures of arbitrary choice. They are not made by the *will*, but spring essentially from the *nature* of God. He is holy, and therefore his volitions are just and good.

“According to Dr. Paley, a different arrangement of the adaptations of the universe would have changed the applications of all moral phraseology, and made that to be right which is now wrong, and that to be wrong which is now right. There is no other difference in the properties expressed by these words than the relation in which they stand to our own happiness. For aught that appears, God *might* command falsehood, perjury, murder, and impiety; and then *they* would be entitled to all the commendations of the opposite virtues. Actions and dispositions are nothing in themselves; they are absolutely without any moral character, without any moral difference, until some expression of the divine will is interposed. It is not till God enjoins it, and it becomes connected with everlasting happiness or misery, that an action or disposition acquires moral significance. Such sentiments contradict the intuitive convictions of the race; and he grievously errs who imagines that he is exalting the will of the Supreme Being, or reflecting a higher glory upon the character of God, by representing all moral distinctions as the accidental creatures of arbitrary choice. If no other account can be given of the excellence and dignity of virtue than that God *happened* to choose it, and to take it under his patronage and favor, we may call vice *unfortunate*, but we can never condemn it as *base*.

„We must, consequently, go beyond the divine command for the true

of human reason to produce this faith. But, in the course of this exposition, he allows himself to utter many extravagant things in disparagement of reason and philosophy.

Christianity finds herself in the midst of an unbelieving world. May she not legitimately take any notice of speculative unbelievers? Is she only to deal with those who already possess true saving faith, thus cutting off from all possible access to salvation, along with the perverse and profane opponent of the truth, every honest doubter groping his way to the light? Not so taught that great thinker, from whom we have already been quoting. "As a system," says he, "*claiming to be divine*, it invites the fullest discussion. As a system *proved to be divine*,

foundation of the moral differences of things; but, as we cannot ascend beyond the Deity himself, we must stop at the perfections of the Divine character. It is because God is *what* he is, that he chooses virtue and condemns vice; and it is because he is what he is *necessarily*, that the distinctions between right and wrong are eternal and immutable. His will is determined by his nature, and his nature is as necessary as his being. His will, consequently, has a law in the essential holiness of his character; and that essential holiness is the ultimate ground, the *fons et origo*, of all moral distinctions.

"But while it is denied that the will of God *creates* the differences betwixt right and wrong, it is not maintained that his will does not adequately express the rule of duty. If Dr. Paley had asserted nothing more than that the divine command was a perfect *measure* of human obligation, no exception could have been taken to his statement. But he obviously meant much more than this; he meant to affirm, in the most unequivocal manner, that the sole distinction betwixt virtue and vice was the arbitrary product of will. It is true, that he subsequently insists upon their respective tendencies, but these cannot be regarded as the ultimate reasons of the divine volitions. All beings are from God, and all the adaptations and adjustments which obtain among them, by virtue of which some are useful and others hurtful, are as much the offspring of his will as their individual existence. Utility finds its standard in his determinations. It is because he has chosen to invest things with such and such properties, and to fix them in such relation to each other, that any place is found for a difference of tendencies. A different order and a different constitution would have completely reversed the present economy. Will, therefore, as mere arbitrary, absolute choice, is the sole cause why things are as they are—why some things are useful and others hurtful—some right and others wrong."

it demands implicit submission. It both admits 'and rejects disputation with difference.'"*

It appears to us that Dr. Ross has laid himself open to the rebuke which, in immediate connexion with the passage just quoted, the same great teacher administers to those divines whose "language has not always been sufficiently guarded" on this subject, and whose "intemperate reprobation of the spirit of perverse speculation * * * has given some pretext to the calumny that faith is inconsistent with reason, and that Christianity repudiates an appeal to argument." "Religion," it is well said by Dr. Thornwell, "from the necessity of the case, is addressed to reason; its duties are represented as a reasonable service, its inspired teachers * * * were accustomed to resort to argument to produce conviction. It is reason which distinguishes man from the brute. Without it, we should be as * * incapable of appreciating a message from God as the 'beasts which perish.'" "To prohibit *rational* is to prohibit *moral* action."

Now, we think it cannot be denied that man's original nature, in the relics of it which still exist, does certify the divinity of the Christian revelation, and that a pretended revelation must be such as it will certify, or it must lack one main element of credibility. But, on the other hand, it is equally certain that the heart of man hates the truth, is blind to the truth, and is no competent judge of what God does reveal. For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit. Surely there is no difficulty in reconciling these two statements. The heart of man is blind, yet it sees; it sees, yet is blind. "See ye indeed, but perceive not." Man's nature is ruined and fallen, yet it does homage to the word. Blind, it yet sees enough to condemn it. And it does condemn itself; and it does certify the truth; and that certificate is both needful and valuable.

Dr. Thornwell points out, (*ibid.*, p. 3,) quoting Locke and Witsius to support him, how the term reason is used in two senses. According to the one it is "the faculty which judges

*See article on the Office of Reason in regard to Revelation. *Southern Presbyterian Review*, Vol. I., p. 2.

of truth and falsehood, right and wrong." Taken in this sense, reason "is necessarily presupposed in the very idea of revelation;" it is the rational creature to whom God thus addresses himself. And there is therefore no room to question whether reason, in this sense of the term, has an office in regard to revelation. The other sense of the term reason makes it "a compendious expression for the principles and maxims, the opinions, conclusions, or prejudices, which, with or without foundation, men acknowledge to be true." And to reason in this sense, "it is not only possible, but likely," that a system preëminently displaying the wisdom and power of God shall appear to be foolishness. It is thus that reason, or what men regard as reason, is "plainly at war with revelation," and any Christian teacher, of course, must err, who would propose to submit the claims of revelation to human reason in this sense of the term. Thus we are brought again to the point already reached, that man is a fallen creature, whose faculties have been perverted and become subject to error, and in whom reason is no longer right reason.

We quote again from Dr. Thornwell: "In regard to doctrines which are *known* to be a révelation from God, there can be no question as to the precise office of reason. The understanding is simply to believe. * * * * When God speaks, faith is the highest exercise of reason. In his testimony, we have all the elements of truth, and his veracity is the ultimate ground of certainty in every species of evidence. The resistless laws of belief which he has impressed upon the constitution of our minds, which lie at the foundation of all human knowledge, * * * derive all their authority from his own unchanging truth. Let it, for a moment, be supposed that God is willing to deceive us, and who could rely with confidence upon the information of his faculties? Who would trust his senses, if the instinct by which he is impelled to do so might, after all, be a false light, to seduce him into error? That instinct is the testimony of God; and what we call reasoning is nothing but the successive steps by which we arrive at the same testimony in the original structure of our minds. Hence belief, even in cases of the strictest demonstration, must, in the last analysis, be traced

to the veracity of God. Reasoning is only a method of ascertaining what God teaches; the true ground of belief is the fact that God *does* teach the proposition in question. * * * All real evidence, whether intuitive, demonstrative, or probable, is only the light with which he irradiates the mind, and we follow it with confidence, because the Strength of Israel is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent." *Ibid.*, p. 5. These statements, which must commend themselves to every considerate Christian, imply that God has a nature unchangingly true and holy, which nature is the sole ground of our confidence in him in all truth. If we should allow Dr. Ross to bury out of sight this great revealed doctrine of God's necessary truthfulness, there would be an end to all reasoning, as well as to all religion.

But, says Dr. Thornwell, "the true question is," what is "the office of reason in those cases in which the reality of the revelation remains yet to be proved?" And he shows, in reply, how a sense of the danger there undoubtedly is in according to human reason the prerogative of judging revelation that it may reject its doctrines, has led certain distinguished writers of the present day to insist, with more zeal than discretion, that only the external evidences of Christianity may, in the first instance, be examined, and that until satisfied of the credentials of the messengers of revelation, reason may not presume to judge the character of the message which they bring. But, contrary to these eminent writers, says Dr. Thornwell, the apostles always remand us "to the *doctrine* as the decisive test of spurious and true revelation." "If there come any unto you and bring not this *doctrine*, receive him not." "But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." "The *doctrine*, and the *doctrine* alone, is made the turning point of the argument. The directions of the apostles were founded upon the obvious principle that one truth cannot contradict another; and therefore whatever contradicted the Scriptures, which were known to be truth, carried upon its face the impression of falsehood." "The proposition is universal that whatever is repugnant to a known

truth, no matter what may be the method by which that truth is ascertained to us—whether by the oracles of God, intuition, demonstration, or experience—cannot be divine, and the application of this principle presupposes the right, which Bishop Wilson denies, to examine the nature of the doctrines, discoveries, or precepts which profess to be from heaven. Even the Papists who, of all men, are most concerned to establish the coëxistence of repugnant truths, admit, with the exception of a few schoolmen who have taught the consistency of the same things being theologically true and philosophically false, or philosophically true and theologically false, that to effect contradictions is not an element of the power of God. But if the right to interrogate the record be denied, admissions of this sort are nothing worth.” *Ibid.*, p. 11.

In direct opposition to all this, Dr. Ross denies to human reason “a right to interrogate the record,” just as he ascribes to God the power “to effect contradictions,” whilst, at the same time, he insists that a revelation from God may contain that which is repugnant to known truth!

We shall make no apology for extracting some longer paragraphs from the article referred to before, by Dr. Thornwell, inasmuch as they will present to the reader, with masterly power, in opposition to Dr. Ross’s theory, a just and true statement of the relation of reason to revelation. “Revelation may be contemplated as imparting to us truths which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive—which ‘descend to us immediately from heaven, and communicate with no principle, no matter, no conclusion here below’—or as proclaiming upon divine authority what we were capable of discovering without the aid of inspiration. In other words, revelation may be regarded, according to its subjects, as either supernatural or natural.” *Ibid.*, p. 12. “The distinction betwixt the supernatural and the natural we conceive to be important, not merely as it serves to give clearer views in reference to the office of reason, but as it equally serves to remove some popular objections sedulously inculcated by Papists to the universal reading of the Scriptures. The obscurity which is alleged to render

them unfit for indiscriminate perusal will be found, on examination, to lie for the most part within the province of the natural; it is of the earth, earthy. Allusions to the events, manners, customs, and institutions of an age long since past—to places of which no trace can be found—to scenery which is not familiar to us, and to modes of thought into which we find it difficult to enter—all of which were simple and natural to the countrymen and contemporaries of the sacred writers—are the sources of no little perplexity and labor to their modern readers. But these things affect the costume, but not the substance, of revelation—the body, but not the soul. Its life must be sought in its supernatural discoveries. This is its own field; and whatever obscurity attaches to them presses as heavily upon the learned as the unlearned—the clergy as the laity. All stand upon the same level. All are equally dependent upon God for his divine illumination; none can claim to be a master—none should submit as a slave. The august mysteries of Christianity are revealed to the meek, however untutored in this world's wisdom—and concealed from the wise, however skilled in philosophy and science. Here *God* is the teacher and man the disciple; and every one in this school must become a fool, in order that he may be wise. The Bible incidentally treats of history, geography, and ancient manners; but these are not the things which give it its value. Christ crucified—its great subject—it is the knowledge of him that saves the soul; and that knowledge is more accessible to the poor and ignorant than to the arrogant disputers of this world.

“But—to resume the immediate subject of discussion—the office of reason in the supernatural department of revelation may be positive, but can never be negative; in the natural it is negative, but only to a very limited extent, if at all, positive. We use the terms positive and negative to indicate the nature of the conclusion, and not the arguments by which it is reached—that being positive by which the reality of the revelation is affirmed, and that negative by which it is denied. When we say, therefore, that reason has no negative jurisdiction in regard to the supernatural, we mean that it is incompetent to infer the spu-

riousness of a pretended revelation, from the nature of its mysteries; that it cannot construct an internal argument from discoveries and doctrines which transcend the limits of natural attainment to convict of falsehood what professes to be divine. The positive jurisdiction which, in this department, we have conceded to reason, refers to the perception of those impressions of his character which it is to be expected God would enstamp upon his word—those traces of power, wisdom, goodness, and glory, which proclaim a divine original, as truly as the works of nature or the dispensations of Providence. Every true revelation must authenticate itself; and the only faculty through which its reflection of the divine image can be manifested to us, is reason. Unenlightened by grace, it is confessedly incompetent to discover God in his word, and consequently never can exercise any positive jurisdiction until it becomes the habitation of the Spirit. It is to the called, and the called alone, that Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The negative power, which we have accorded to reason in the department of the natural, implies that it is competent to say, to a certain extent, what a revelation ought not to be, though it is not competent to say what it ought to be. It is able here to convict a pretended revelation of imposture, by showing that it contains contradictions, palpable falsehoods, or gross absurdities; though it cannot infer that a system is truly divine, because it is free from objections which would be fatal to its credit. The sum of our doctrine, then, is, that in the supernatural, reason may prove, but cannot refute, the claims of a pretended revelation; in the natural, it may refute, but cannot establish." *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15. "The doctrine which we have endeavored to illustrate, that reason possesses no negative jurisdiction in regard to the mysteries or supernatural facts of revelation, because it possesses no previous knowledge which they can contradict, subverts the basis of the whole system of philosophical infidelity. The corner-stone of the fabric is the competency of man to determine beforehand what a revelation should contain. That, from the very nature of the case, it deals with the unknown, and contemplates us in the attitude of learners and not of

teachers, of servants and interpreters, and not lords and masters, is a proposition, simple and obvious as it is, which the disciples of Herbert, Bolingbroke, and Hume, have entirely overlooked. The legitimate conclusion from their principles is either that man possesses, in his natural faculties and resources, the means of omniscience, or that whatever God knows beyond the reach of reason must forever remain an impenetrable secret with himself." *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Dr. Ross treats the venerable name of Bishop Butler with disrespect. (See Art. II., p. 220.) This shall not deter us from confirming what has just now been said, by quoting a few words from his immortal pen, as we find them referred to in Dr. Thornwell's article. The great Bishop says that reason "is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself;" and he says, also, that a "supposed revelation" can be proved false from internal characters. "For it may contain clear immoralities or contradictions, and either of these would prove it false." Analogy, Part II., Ch. 3.

We shall still further confirm what has been said in opposition to Dr. Ross, by a few words from the eminent John Owen:

"So, if any pretend unto *revelations by faith*, which are contradictory unto the first principles of natural light, or reason in its proper exercise about its proper objects, it is a delusion. On this ground, the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation is justly rejected; for it proposeth that as a revelation by faith which is expressly contradictory unto our sense and reason in their proper exercise about their proper objects. And a supposition of the possibility of any such thing would make the ways whereby God reveals and makes known himself to cross and interfere one with another; which would leave us no certainty in anything, divine or human."*

"What reason do they intend? If reason absolutely, the reason of things—we grant that nothing contrary unto it is to be admitted. But reason as it is in this or that man, particularly in themselves, we know to be weak, maimed, and imperfect. * * * * Reason in the abstract, or the just measure of the answering of one thing unto another, is of great moment. But reason, that is, what is pretended to be so, or appears to be

*See Owen's Reason of Faith. Works, Vol. III., p. 328.

so unto this or that man especially, and about things of divine revelation, is of very small importance; of none at all where it riseth up against the express testimonies of Scripture, and these multiplied to their mutual confirmation and explanation."*

In reviewing this discussion, we have confined our attention to the two points upon which it turns. Before we close, however, we must offer a few words upon some of the more important theological bearings of Dr. Ross's theory. It is, in the first place, utterly inconsistent with the holiness of God, which is his glory. According to Dr. Ross, it is by mere arbitrary choice that God prefers holiness to sin. There is no essential eternal distinction between them. There was no reason in his own nature why he should prefer the one to the other. This plainly is tantamount to saying that he has no holy nature.

Again, in like manner, this theory is utterly opposed to the essential and eternal justice of God. It does not agree with his ineffable hatred against sin. Disguise it as the author may, his theory makes God indifferent to moral distinctions. They are what they are by an arbitrary act of his creating will, for no reason whatever based in his own nature. In the most absolute freedom of his own will, he creates them one way, but might have created them the very opposite way. Nothing in the nature of these distinctions themselves, nor even in his own nature, stood in the way of his reversing right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and evil. To say that he could not have reversed these distinctions; that he was not free to make evil good and good evil, is to say that there is an essential and eternal difference betwixt them, grounded in his own nature.

The law of God, moreover, is sacrificed by Dr. Ross's theory. It is stripped of its honor, if you make it the product of mere arbitrary will. Say that there is not in God's nature any necessary and eternal foundation for the discriminations which this law makes between good and evil, and you despoil it of the reverence which is its due.

Still further, this theory destroys the idea of any intrinsic

*See Owen's *Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated*. Works, Vol. X., p 510.

necessary evil in sin. Between sin and holiness, the human mind cannot help acknowledging a distinction not arbitrary, but eternal and necessary. Dr. Ross would obliterate this inherent, native sense of sin in the human soul.

Finally, this theory annihilates the necessity of the atonement. That necessity is based in the eternal fact that God's vindicatory justice is an essential attribute of his nature, that he venerates his own law, and that his nature is inflexibly holy. If God's preference for holiness to sin is arbitrary, he might easily forgive sin. If there be no essential and eternal distinction between sin and holiness, it is impossible for us to believe that the Judge of all the earth would demand atonement for it at so great a cost as the honor and life of his only begotten Son.

These are very grave consequences to be imputed to any Christian minister's doctrine. The errors they involve are fundamental. We do not charge that Dr. Ross accepts any one of them. But it is our strong conviction that they flow logically from his principles, and we doubt not that nine-tenths of our readers will agree with us.

Did our limits allow, we should feel bound to comment severely upon the lax views of morality, akin to these fundamental theological errors, which the author sets forth in his exposition of some of the commandments of the Decalogue. But enough has been said by us to constitute a solemn and earnest protest against these false and dangerous opinions: and this being accomplished, we lay down our pen.