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ART. I.—REVIEW OF SPRAGUE'S LECTURES TO
YOUNG PEOPLE.

*Lectures to Young People, by William B. Sprague, D. D.
Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Albany,
with an Introductory Address by Samuel Miller, D. D.,
Professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton.*
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IT is the highest wisdom of man to endeavour to discover, and to follow the plan of God. This plan is manifested in the nature of his creatures, in the dispensations of his providence, and in his word. It is our business to fall in with this; never, from vain ideas of doing more good, venturing to counteract it. Thus, the different natures which God has given the sexes, renders it necessary, in order that the greatest perfection should be attained, and the greatest good effected, that the difference should be carefully preserved; that the man should not assume the position, or discharge the duties of the woman; and that the woman should not step out of her appropriate sphere into the province of the man. This is, however, a common evil. Unenlightened zeal in religion often leads to a greater or less infringement of the plan of God, in this respect. Women take a stand, and undertake to discharge duties, which

God's hands, nor to use any means which he has not clearly authorized in his holy word; and that if they do, they commit the sin of preferring their own contrivances before the appointments of his infinite wisdom; on which there is no probability that he will ever confer his blessing. Be exceedingly careful, therefore, to adopt no measures, and to give no advice, but such as are plainly warranted in the scriptures of truth. But, keeping strictly to your inspired guide, and feeling at every step your dependence on God for success, go forward with a holy zeal and an inflexible perseverance, counting it your highest honour—though the world reproach and infidels sneer, as you must expect that they will—if you may be the humble instruments of saving souls from death, and hiding a multitude of sins. And now, praying that in this holy work, and in all your studies and preparations for the ministry of the gospel of Christ, you may receive a large portion of the grace and blessing of God our Saviour, I affectionately bid you farewell.

The preceding Address, in which it was the object of an aged minister of the gospel to give, in a very plain and familiar manner, some useful information, advice, and exhortation to his young brethren, was originally written in great haste, and without a thought that a word of it would ever appear in print. But he has yielded, perhaps indiscreetly, to the request of one of the conductors of the Biblical Repertory, to permit it to appear in this work, and with but little variation from the identical terms in which it was delivered.

ART. VI.—AN INQUIRY INTO THAT INABILITY UNDER WHICH THE SINNER LABOURS, AND WHETHER IT FURNISHES ANY EXCUSE FOR HIS NEGLECT OF DUTY.

THERE has occurred, within our recollection, a considerable difference in the manner of treating this subject, especially in addresses to the impenitent, from the pulpit. It was customary formerly, for Calvinistic preachers to insist much on the helpless inability of the sinner. He was represented, according to the language of the Scriptures, to be “dead in trespasses and sins,” and utterly unable to put forth one act of spiritual life; and too often this true representation was so given, as to leave the impression, that the person labouring under this total inability was not culpable for the omission of acts, which he had

no power to perform. The fact of man's being a free accountable agent was not brought into view with sufficient prominence; and the consequence was, that, in many cases, the impenitent sinner felt as if he were excusable; and the conclusion was too commonly adopted that there was no encouragement to make any effort, until it should please a sovereign God to work. And, if at any time, the zealous preacher urged upon his hearers, in private, the duty of repentance, he was sure to hear the echo of his own doctrines; we are incapable of doing any thing; until God shall be pleased to work in us 'to will and to do of his good pleasure,' it is useless for us to attempt any thing. We do not say, that the inability of man was so represented by all as to produce these impressions, for we know that, by some, not only man's dependence, but also his duty, was distinctly and forcibly inculcated.

Some excellent men, who saw the danger of so insisting on the inability of man as to furnish an apology for the careless sinner, borrowed a little aid from the Arminian scheme, and taught, that, if the sinner would do what was in his power, and continue faithfully to use the outward means of grace, the Spirit of God would assist his endeavours: and thus a connection was formed between the strivings of the unregenerate and the grace of God. But this was not consistent with the other opinions of these men, and involved them in many practical difficulties, and contradicted many clear passages of Scripture, which teach, that "without faith it is impossible to please God:" and it seemed to be obviously absurd, that the promise of grace should be made to acts and exercises which, it could not be denied, were in their nature sinful. Some, indeed, spoke of a kind of sincerity which they supposed an unregenerate sinner might possess; but it was found difficult to tell what it was; and another difficulty was, to quiet the minds of those convinced sinners, who had been long using the means of grace. Such persons would allege, that they had prayed, and read, and heard the word, for a long time, and yet received no communications of grace. To such, nothing could, on this plan, be said, but to exhort them to wait God's time, and to entertain the confident hope, that no soul ever perished, that continued to the last seeking for mercy. The inconvenience and evil of these representations being perceived, many adopted, with readiness, a distinction of human ability into *natural* and *moral*. By the first, they understood, merely the possession of physical powers and opportunities; by the lat-

ter, a mind rightly disposed. In accordance with this distinction, it was taught, that every man possessed a natural ability to do all that God required of him; but that every sinner laboured under a moral inability to obey God, which, however, could not be pleaded in excuse for his disobedience, as it consisted in corrupt dispositions of the heart, for which every man was responsible. Now, this view of the subject is substantially correct, and the distinction has always been made by every person, in his judgments of his own conduct and that of others. It is recognized in all courts of justice, and in all family government, and is by no means a modern discovery. And yet it is remarkable, that it is a distinction so seldom referred to, or brought distinctly into view, by old Calvinistic authors. The first writer among English theologians, that we have observed using this distinction explicitly, is the celebrated Dr. Twisse, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and the able opposer of Arminianism and advocate of the Supralapsarian doctrine of divine decrees. It was also resorted to by the celebrated Mr. Howe, and long afterwards, used freely by Dr. Isaac Watts, the popularity of whose evangelical writings, probably, had much influence in giving it currency. It is also found in the theological writings of Dr. Witherspoon, and many others, whose orthodoxy was never disputed. But, in this country, no man has had so great an influence in fixing the language of theology, as Jonathan Edwards, president of New-Jersey College. In his work on "The Freedom of the Will," this distinction holds a prominent place, and is very important to the argument which this profound writer has so ably discussed in that treatise. The general use of the distinction between natural and moral ability may, therefore, be ascribed to the writings of president Edwards, both in Europe and America. No distinguished writer on theology has made more use of it than Dr. Andrew Fuller; and it is well known, that he imbibed nearly all his views of theology from an acquaintance with the writings of president Edwards. And it may be said truly, that Jonathan Edwards has done more to give complexion to the theological system of Calvinists in America, than all other persons together. This is more especially true of New-England; but it is also true, to a great extent, in regard to a large number of the present ministers of the Presbyterian church. Those, indeed, who were accustomed either to the Scotch or Dutch writers, did not adopt this distinction, but were jealous of it as an innovation,

and as tending to diminish, in their view, the miserable and sinful state of man, and as derogatory to the grace of God. But we have remarked that, in almost all cases where the distinction has been opposed as false, or as tending to the introduction of false doctrine, it has been misrepresented. The true ground of the distinction has not been clearly apprehended; and those who deny it have been found making it themselves in other words; for, that an inability depending on physical defect, should be distinguished from that which arises from a wicked disposition, or perverseness of will, is a thing which no one can deny, who attends to the clear dictates of his own mind; for it is a self-evident truth, which even children recognize, in all their apologies for their conduct. We do not assert, however, that the dispute between the advocates and opposers of this distinction, has been a mere logomachy. There is one important point of difference. They who reject the distinction, maintain that if we have lost any physical ability to perform our duty by our own fault, the obligation to obedience remains, although the ability to execute it is utterly lost; while the advocates of the distinction between natural and moral ability hold, that obligation and ability must be of equal extent; and although they admit that we are accountable for the loss of any faculty which takes place through our fault, yet the guilt must be referred entirely to the original act, and no new sin can be committed for not exercising a faculty which does not exist, or which is physically incapable of the actions in question. To illustrate this point, let us suppose the case of a servant cutting off his hands to avoid the work required of him. The question then is, is this servant guilty of a crime for not employing those members which he does not possess? It is admitted, that he is chargeable with the consequences of his wicked act, but this only goes to show the greater guilt of that deed. It is also true, that if the same perverse disposition which led to this act is still cherished, he is virtually guilty of the neglect of that obedience which was due. Sin consists essentially in the motives, dispositions, and volitions of the heart, and the external act only possesses a moral nature by its connection with these internal affections. But it cannot be truly said, that a man can be guilty of a crime in not using hands which he does not possess. Let us suppose this servant to have become truly penitent, and to have nothing in his mind but a strong desire to do his duty, can any impartial man believe, that he commits a sin in not doing the work, which he has no hands to execute? We

think not. The case will appear more evident if the faculty lost should be one which is essential to moral agency; as if a man should by his own fault deprive himself of reason. It is manifest, that a man totally destitute of reason, is incapable of any moral acts; and this is equally true, however this defect may have been contracted. If a man performs an act by which he knows reason will be extinguished or perverted, he is guilty in that act of a crime which takes its measure, in part, from the consequences likely to ensue. Thus in the case of the drunkard; he who destroys his reason by ebriety, may be considered as guilty of an act, the guilt of which has respect to all the probable consequences. In human courts, we are aware, that intoxication cannot be pleaded as a justification of crime; but on this subject it may be observed, that drunkards are not commonly so destitute of a knowledge of right and wrong as to be deprived of their moral agency. And, again, it would be of dangerous consequence to admit the principle, that a man might plead one crime in justification of another; and it would be exceedingly liable to abuse, as a man might become intoxicated for the very purpose of committing a great crime; or he might affect a greater degree of intoxication than was real; so that it is a sound political maxim, that a man shall be held responsible for all acts committed in a state of ebriety. But *in foro conscientiae*, we cannot but view the matter in a different light. If by an intoxicating liquor reason is completely subverted, and the man is no longer himself, we cannot judge that he is as accountable for what he does, as when in his sober senses. You may accumulate as much guilt as you will on the act of extinguishing or perverting his reason; but you cannot think that what he madly perpetrates under the influence of strong drink is equally criminal, as if committed while reason was in exercise. This we take to be the deliberate judgment of all impartial men.

The most difficult question relative to this matter is, whether ignorance and error do wholly, or in any degree exculpate from the guilt of actions committed under their influence. On this subject, it has been customary to distinguish ignorance (and all error is only a species of ignorance,) into voluntary and involuntary. The former, however great, does not excuse; the latter, if invincible does; or mitigates criminality in proportion as it approximates to insuperable ignorance. But when we speak of voluntary ignorance; we do not mean that there is a deliberate volition to remain in ignorance; or that it could be

removed by an act of will; but we mean *that* ignorance or misconception, which is a part of our depravity, or a consequence of it. A mind depraved by sin is incapable of perceiving the beauty and sweetness of spiritual objects; and is, therefore, totally incapable of loving such objects. This ignorance constitutes an essential part of human depravity, and can never be an apology for it, nor in the least exculpate from the guilt of sins committed under its influence. It is, in fact, that very blindness of mind and unbelief of heart, which lies at the foundation of all departures from God. To which we may add, that the actual exercise of corrupt affections obscures the intellect and perverts the judgment, as has been remarked by all moralists; and the same is observable in all the common transactions of life. Ignorance or error, induced by criminal self-love, or by malignant passions, forms no excuse for the evil which flows from this source; but this very ignorance and error form a part of that sinful character which belongs to the moral agent. We are aware, that there has been current with many, in our day, a theory which separates entirely between the intellect and will, and maintains that the former in its operations, is incapable of virtue or vice; and to corroborate this opinion, a distinction has been made of the powers of the soul itself, into natural and moral. By this division, the understanding or intellect belongs to the former class, the will and affections to the latter. According to this hypothesis, all sin consists in voluntary acts, or in the exercise of the will; and the understanding is incapable of moral obliquity, because it is not a moral faculty. They who have adopted this theory (and they are many) entertain the opinion, that depravity consists very much in the opposition of the heart to the dictates of the understanding. In regeneration, according to them, there is no illumination of the understanding by the Holy Spirit. This, according to the theory under consideration, is altogether unnecessary. This work, therefore, consists in nothing else, than giving a new heart, or a new set of feelings. If the person has received correct doctrinal instruction, no other illumination is needed; and the whole difference in the conceptions of truth, between the regenerate and unregenerate, is owing to nothing else than a change in the feelings; for, as far as mere intellect is concerned, the views of the understanding are the same before regeneration as afterwards; except, that a renewed heart disposing the person to the impartial love of truth, he will be more careful to collect and weigh its evidences, and will

thus be preserved from errors into which the unregenerate, through the corrupt bias produced by the affections, are prone to fall.

Now, against this whole method of philosophizing, we enter our dissent. This total dissociation of the understanding and heart; and this entire repugnance between them, is contrary to all experience. There can be no exercise of heart which does not necessarily involve the conception of the intellect; for that which is chosen must be apprehended; and that which is loved and admired, must be perceived. And although, it is true, that the knowledge of the unregenerate man is inefficacious, so that while he knows the truth, he loves it not; yet we venture to maintain, that the reason why his knowledge produces no effect, is simply because it is inadequate. It does not present truth in its true colours, to the heart. It is called speculative knowledge, and may be correct as far as it goes; but it does not penetrate the excellence and the beauty of any one spiritual object; and it may be averred, that the affections of the heart do always correspond with the real views of the understanding. The contrary supposition, instead of proving that man is morally depraved, would show that his rationality was destroyed. If it be alleged, that this apprehension of the beauty, sweetness, and glory of spiritual things, which is peculiar to the regenerate, arises merely from the altered state of the heart, I have no objection to the statement, if by *heart* be meant the moral nature of the renewed mind; but it is reversing the order of nature and rational exercise to suppose, that we first have an affection of love to an object, and then see it to be lovely. We may ask, what excited this affection of love? If any thing is known of the order of exercises in the rational mind, the perception of the qualities on which an affection terminates, is, in the order of nature, prior to the affection. The soul, in an unregenerate state, is equally incapable of seeing and feeling aright in relation to spiritual objects. And, indeed, we hardly know how to distinguish between the clear perception of the beauty of an object, and the love of that object: the one might serve as a just description of the other. Not but that the intellect and heart may be distinguished; but when beauty, sweetness, excellence, and glory, or good in any of its forms, is the object of the understanding, this distinction, in experience, vanishes. And accordingly the schoolmen distinguished between the understanding and will, not by referring nothing to the latter but blind feeling; but by dividing all

objects which could be presented to the mind, into such as were received as *true* merely, and such as were not merely apprehended as true, but as *good*. These last they considered as having relation to the will, under which all appetitive affections were included.

The Scriptures have been repeatedly appealed to, as placing all moral acts in the will; but they furnish no aid to those who make this wide distinction between understanding and will. They do often use the word *heart* for moral exercise, but not to the exclusion of the intellect. Indeed, this word in the Old Testament, where it most frequently occurs, is used for the whole soul; or for any strong exercise of the intellect, as well as the feelings. We are required to love with the understanding; and "a wise and understanding heart," is a mode of expression which shows how little the inspired penmen were influenced by a belief of this modern theory. And, in the New Testament, to "believe with the heart," includes the intellect as much as what is called the will. It means, to believe really and sincerely; so to believe, as to be affected by what we believe, according to its nature. But is not all moral exercise voluntary, or an exercise of the will? yes, undoubtedly; and so is all moral exercise rational, or such as involves the exercise of intellect. If the will were a moral power, as many suppose, then every volition would be of a moral nature—the instinctive preference of life to death would be moral; the choice of happiness in preference to misery, which no sentient being can avoid, would be moral. At this rate, it would follow, that mere animals are moral beings, because it is certain they possess will. But the simple truth is, that the understanding and will stand in the same relation to the morality of actions; and the latter no more deserves to be called the moral part of our constitution than the former. The only faculty belonging to our constitution, which can properly be denominated moral, is conscience; not because its exercise furnishes the only instance of moral acts; for it may be doubted whether the monitions of this faculty partake of a moral nature; but because by this we are enabled to perceive the moral qualities of actions.

Our object in this discussion is, to establish the point, that ignorance is a part of the depravity which sin has introduced into our minds; and we maintain, in strict accordance with the Scriptures, that no unregenerate man has any adequate or true knowledge of God; nor, indeed, is he capable of such know-

ledge. It is a comprehensive description of the wicked, that "they know not God." "Know not the way of peace." To know the true God and Jesus Christ is eternal life. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." The regenerate have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, and have been translated from darkness to the marvellous light of the Gospel. As to invincible ignorance, it is manifest, that it must stand on the same footing with the want of the requisite physical powers. It is equally impossible for a man to see, whether he be deficient in the organs of vision or in light. If God has revealed his will on certain points, and in consequence has demanded our faith and obedience, the obligation to perform these duties will be co-extensive with the communication of this revelation, and no further. The heathen, therefore, will not be condemned for not believing in the Messiah, "for how could they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" This, however, will not be any excuse for not seeking after more light by every means in their power. If persons, who are surrounded by the means of instruction obstinately, neglect to avail themselves of the opportunity of knowing the will of God, they do render themselves exceedingly guilty by such perverseness, and make themselves responsible for all the omission of duty which arises from this state of obstinate ignorance.

Let us now return to the inquiry respecting natural and moral inability. We asserted, that all men, and even children, were in the constant habit of making a distinction between an impediment to the doing of a thing, which arose from want of physical power, and that which depended solely on the disposition or will. But it may be useful to inquire, whether any advantage has been derived from the use of these terms; or, whether they have not rather served to perplex and mislead the people, for whose benefit they were devised. That this latter is probably a correct statement of the truth, may with some probability, be presumed from the fact, that these terms are evidently falling into disuse with many who were once tenacious of them. But to render this more evident, we would remark, that there is an obvious inaccuracy in speaking of two kinds of ability, both of which are requisite to accomplish the same object. If both are necessary to the end, then, evidently, either by itself is not an ability. If the strength of a man, together with a machine of a certain power be necessary to lift a weight.

it is evidently incorrect to say, that the hand of the man is able to elevate this heavy body; his strength is only an ability when combined with the machine, which is needed to give it force; so, if the mere possession of natural powers to do the commandments of God is not of itself sufficient to reach the end, it is not properly called an *ability*; it is only such when combined with what is called moral ability.

Again, the word *natural* is here used in an uncommon and technical sense; and the term being already in common use, in relation to the same subject, in a sense entirely different, it is calculated to perplex and mislead. When we say, man possesses a natural ability, we mean by the word *natural* that which is contra-distinguished from moral; that which is destitute of any moral quality; but we are accustomed to say, and the usage is derived from Scripture, that man is naturally depraved, naturally blind, naturally impotent: but in this case we mean, that which is innate; that which is constitutional; and when applied to this subject, the meaning is entirely diverse from the one stated above; for while *there*, all idea of moral character is excluded, *here* it relates to moral qualities. Man is naturally able to obey the commandments of God:—man is naturally a depraved and impotent being, are contradictions, if the word *natural* be used in the same sense, in both cases; but as intended, there is no contradiction; for the word, in the first instance, has an entirely different meaning from what it has in the second. But surely, such confusion in the use of terms should be avoided. And if you will inquire of the common people what they understand by natural ability, you will be convinced, that it is a phrase which perplexes and obscures, rather than elucidates the subject. We have known instances, in which clergymen of some learning, and even doctors of divinity, have understood, that they who held the doctrine of man's natural ability, denied that of total depravity; whereas, the fact is, that there are no sterner advocates of universal and total depravity than those who make this distinction.

But an objection of a different but not less weighty kind, lies against the use of the phrases, "moral ability" and "moral inability." By the former is meant, that state of the heart or affections which leads a person to choose to perform any act of external obedience; by the latter, the contrary, or an indisposition or unwillingness to do our duty. Now, we know, that the law of God extends to the heart, and requires rectitude in every secret thought and affection; yea, the essence of obe-

dience consists in this conformity of the heart to the law of God. But according to the import of this distinction, these internal affections are no more than a moral ability to obey. The phrase seems to contemplate external acts only as acts of obedience, and the affections of the heart as the ability to perform them; but this is evidently incorrect. What is the sum of the obedience which the law of God requires of man? Is it not supreme and perfect love? What is moral ability? It is this very thing in which the essence of obedience consists. This moral ability should relate to something prior to love; but what ability is that which is prior to all holy affection? If you say the nature or disposition, the law requires that this be pure also, as well as the acts and exercises. There is, then, no such thing as a moral ability to obey, as distinct from obedience itself. And, again, what is moral inability, but sin itself? It is the want of a right temper and a holy will—the defect of that love which the law requires; and what is this, but sin? It certainly can have no other effect but to mislead, to call the essence of disobedience, by the name of “moral inability.” It can be no question, whether sin can furnish any excuse for disobedience. Now what is called “moral inability,” when it comes to be analysed, is nothing but the essence of sin, as it exists in the heart. Man labours under a moral inability to obey God, because he does not love him; but love is the sum and essence of all obedience; it is the same, therefore, as to say, that man, in his natural state, has no love to God. Man is in a state of sin, which, while it continues, must be an effectual hinderance to the service of God.

We have already remarked, that the distinction of inability into *natural* and *moral*, is much less used of late, than it was some fifteen or twenty years ago. It has not answered the purpose for which it was invented. If there be a real inability which man cannot remove, it must have the effect of discouraging human exertions. Let it be conceded, that it does not render man excusable; yet it does render his unassisted efforts ineffectual; therefore, they who consider it all important, not merely to fix upon the conscience the conviction of ill-desert, but to rouse the powers of the soul to action, have adopted a new method of treating this subject, which not a little alarms those who are tenacious of old notions and the ancient forms of speech. These new preachers, in their addresses to the impenitent sinner, say nothing about natural and moral inability. They preach, that man is in possession of every ability which

is requisite for the discharge of his duty. That it is as easy for him to repent, to exercise faith, and to love God, as to speak, or eat, or walk, or perform any other act. And men are earnestly and passionately exhorted, to come up at once to the performance of their duty. Nothing is more in the power of a man, they allege, than his own will, and the consent of the will to the terms of the gospel, is all that is required to constitute any man a christian. When sinners are awakened, and become anxious about their salvation, it is deemed by these teachers improper to manifest any sympathy with their feelings of pungent conviction; for the only reason of their remaining in distress, is their obstinate continuance in impenitence. All conversation with such, therefore, should assume the character of stern rebuke, and continued earnest exhortations to *submit* to God, to give up their rebellion, and to make choice of the service of God. And if any convinced sinner ventures to express the opinion, that he labours under any sort of inability to do what is required of him, he is severely reprov'd, as wishing to roll the blame of his impenitence on his Maker. And it is believed, that upon the new plan of treating awakened sinners, they are brought to the enjoyment of peace much sooner, than upon the old plan of treating them rather as unfortunate than as guilty. Men, upon being assured that salvation is in their power, are induced to make an exertion to submit to God, and do often persuade themselves that now they have complied with their duty, and have passed from death unto life. There is much reason to fear, however, that many souls, who have very slight convictions of sin, are deluded into the opinion, that they have submitted, and are reconciled to God, though they have never been led to any deep views of the dreadful sinfulness of their own hearts. And, others, who have deeper convictions, find all their own efforts unavailing; and while they confess that the fault is in the total depravity of their nature, continue to profess their inability to repent; and whatever power others may have to change the heart, are more and more convinced, that no such power belongs to them. The obstinate cases cannot but be perplexing and troublesome to the zealous preachers of full ability; but they contrive to reconcile them with their doctrine, by various methods, which it is not to our purpose to specify. Now, as a large portion of our younger theologians appear to be adopting this new theory of ability, and consider it a great improvement upon both the old Calvinistic doctrine, and also upon the Edwardean theory of

natural and moral ability; and especially, as it claims a near alliance with the many revivals of religion which are now in progress in the church, it becomes a duty of high obligation to bring these opinions, which are now so widely and confidently inculcated, to the test of reason and Scripture; and we trust that our readers will indulge us, while we enter, with some degree of minuteness, into the discussion. And, to give our views clearly and fully on the subject of man's ability and inability, we shall endeavour to go back to first principles, and cautiously examine those maxims, which, by most who speak on this subject, are taken for granted.

On the subject of man's moral agency and accountableness, there is no controversy.

It is also agreed by most, that an obligation to perform an act of obedience supposes the existence of the faculties or physical powers, requisite for its performance. An irrational being cannot be under a moral obligation to perform a rational act. Man cannot be under obligation to do what requires powers which do not belong to his nature and constitution. For example, man could not justly be required to transport himself from earth to heaven, as the angels do, because this exceeds the power which belongs to his nature. And it is admitted, that where there is a willingness to perform a duty, any thing which renders the execution of our desire impracticable, removes the obligation. For no man can be bound to perform impossibilities. The maxim, *that obligation to obey any command supposes the existence of an ability to do the action required*, relates entirely to actions consequent upon volitions. If we appeal to the common sense, or universal judgment of mankind, on this point, we must be careful to understand precisely the common principle respecting which all men are agreed; and must be careful, not to extend the maxim to other things, entirely distinct from its usual application. An infant cannot justly be required to build a house or a ship. A person of weak intellect and little invention, cannot be obliged to write an elegant poem. No man can be under obligation to remember every word which he ever spoke, and every thought which ever passed through his mind. A man who has lost his hands or his feet, cannot afterwards be under a moral obligation to exercise these members. This case is so plain, and the judgment of men so uniform on the subject, that we need not dwell longer upon the point.

The next thing to be inquired, is, whether this maxim applies to the ability of *willing* as well as *doing*.

And here it may be remarked, that the possession of the faculty of willing, or of choosing and refusing, is essential to a moral agent; and therefore, a being who has no such faculty, can never be subject to a moral law. On this point there can be no difference of opinion. Neither is it supposed by any, that we have the power of avoiding an exercise of will, when an object is proposed; or when a particular action is in the contemplation of the mind; for, if we do not choose a proposed object, we of course refuse it; and if we do not determine on an action which may be suggested, we of necessity let it alone. There is here no other alternative. Hence, it is evident, that the liberty of man does not consist in the power to will or not to will. In regard to this, man may be said to lie under necessity; but it is obviously no hardship, since he is at liberty to will as he pleases. But the most important question is, has the moral agent the power of willing differently from what he does in any particular case? This is a very intricate subject, and will require close attention, and an impartial judgment, in order to see clearly where the truth lies.

The word *will* is taken in a greater or less latitude. It signifies, according to some, every desire and inclination; every preference and choice. According to others, *volitions*, or the acts of the will, are properly such acts of the mind as result in some change of the body or mind. The whole active power of man consists in an ability, when he chooses to exercise it, to alter the train of thought, by turning the mind from one subject of contemplation to another; and in the ability to move the members of the body, within certain limits. Let any man seriously inquire, whether he possesses any other power or ability than this. We know that there are many things which he has no ability to perform. He cannot alter the nature of the perceptions of sense; he cannot excite in himself affections to any objects at will. If a man wish to enkindle love in his breast to any person, he cannot possibly do more than contemplate all the traits of character which are amiable in that person, or all those circumstances which have a tendency to create an interest in the person: but it is a vain effort to endeavour to love another by the mere effort of will. If we take the word *will* in the larger sense, all clear distinction between desire and will is removed. If we call every preference an act of volition, then, obviously, will and affection are confounded; for

what is preference, but a superior affection ; and choice, if it result in no determination to act, is nothing else but preference, or the cherishing a stronger affection for one thing than another. It seems to us, therefore, to be altogether expedient, to confine the words *will* and *volition* to those distinctly marked actions, which lead to some change in body or mind. Those determinations which lead directly to action, whether of body or mind, are properly called volitions ; as when I resolve to raise my hand ; to direct my eyes to this quarter or that ; to turn my thoughts from one subject to another. These are acts which are clearly defined, and which are easily distinguishable from mere desires or emotions. A late philosophical writer has, indeed, attempted to sweep away all controversies respecting the determination of the will, by confounding will and desire together : but still he is obliged to acknowledge, that some of our desires are followed by action, or by a change in the body or mind ; and these being thus clearly distinguished by their effects, and being also the most important of all our acts, it is expedient to have them put into a class by themselves, with an appropriate denomination.

But let us return to the inquiry already instituted, which is, whether, when we will any particular thing, we have it in our power to will the contrary ? Here it will be acknowledged, at once, that a man cannot will at the same time opposite things ; for if he determines on an act, he cannot determine to let it alone. When it is asked, whether the person who wills an action had it in his power to omit it, the answer is, that if he had been so inclined, he could have willed the opposite. The very nature of a volition is, the resolving on that which is agreeable to our inclinations. To suppose any constraint or compulsion in willing, is absurd ; for then it would not be a volition. No greater liberty can be conceived, than freely to choose what we please. But if the import of the question is, whether with an inclination one way, we are able to will the very contrary ? the thing is absurd. If we were capable of such a volition, it would be a most unreasonable act. Such a self-determining power as would lead to such acts, would render man incapable of being governed by a moral law, and would subject him, so far as such a power was exercised, to the most capricious control. He could no longer be said to be the master of himself ; for while his whole soul was inclined to one thing, he might be led in an opposite direction, without having any reason or motive for his conduct. Such a power as this, no one, I think,

will plead for, who understands its nature. Man has the power to determine his own will, but in accordance with his own inclinations—the only kind of power over the will which any reasonable being can wish. If I can will as I please, surely I need not complain that I cannot will as I do not please. If I govern my volitions by my prevailing inclination, this is surely a greater privilege, and more truly liberty, than a power to determine the will without any motive, and contrary to all my wishes. My actions are as truly my own and self-determined, when they accord with inclination, as if they could spring up without any desire. Many philosophical men, from a fear of being involved in the doctrine of necessity, have talked and reasoned most absurdly, in relation to this point. And it is to be regretted, that many writers, who have substantially maintained the true doctrine of the will, have employed language which has had the effect of confirming their prejudices. To talk of a necessity of willing as we do, although we may qualify the word by “moral,” or “philosophical,” is inexpedient. There can be no necessity in volition. It is the very opposite of necessity. It is liberty itself. Because volition has a determinate cause which makes it what it is, this does not alter the case. If the cause be a free agent, and the kind of volition be determined by the unconstrained inclinations of the heart, the freedom of our actions is no how affected, by this certain connection between volitions and their cause. The contrary doctrine involves the monstrous absurdity, that volitions have no cause, and no reason for being what they are. If then, we can will as we please, we have all conceivable liberty and power, so far as the will is concerned. But the maxim, that no man is under obligation to do that which he has no power to perform, does not apply to the act of volition, as was before observed, but to the ability to act according to our will.

We come now to the inquiry, whether a man has a power to change the affections of his heart ; or to turn the current of his inclinations in a contrary direction to that in which they run. On this subject, our first remark is, that the very supposition of a person being sincerely desirous to make such a change, is absurd ; for, if there existed a prevailing desire that our affections should not be attached to certain objects, then already the change has taken place : but while our souls are carried forth in strong affections to an object, it is a contradiction to say that that soul desires the affections to be removed from that object : for what is affection, but the outgoing of the soul with desire and

delight, towards an object? But, to suppose a desire not to love the object which has attracted our affections, is to suppose two opposite affections prevailing in the same soul, at the same time, and in relation to the same object. It is true, that there may exist conflicting desires, in regard to the objects which are pursued; for, while with a prevailing desire we are led on to seek them, there may, and often do exist, inferior desires, which draw us, according to their force, in another direction. Thus, a drunkard may be prevailingly inclined to seek the gratification which he expects from strong drink; but while he is resolved to indulge his appetite, a regard to health, reputation, and the comfort of his family, may produce a contrary desire; but, in the case supposed, it is overcome by the stronger inclination which a vitious appetite has generated. It is also true, as has been remarked by president Edwards, that in contemplating some future time, a man may desire that the appetite or affection which now governs him, may be subdued. And again, a man may be brought into such circumstances, that his desire of happiness, or dread of eternal misery, may be so strong as to induce him to wish that his predominant affections might be changed; and under the powerful influence of these constitutional principles, he may be led to will a change in the temper of his mind, and the inclinations of his heart. The question is, whether a volition to change the desires or dispositions is ever effectual. If our philosophy of the mind be correct, this is a thing entirely out of the power of the will. Every person, however, can put the matter to the test of experience, at any moment. The best way to prove to ourselves that we have a power over our affections, is to exercise it. Who was ever conscious of loving any person or thing, merely from willing to do so? What power, then, has the sinner to change his own heart? He does not love God, but is at enmity with him—how shall he change his enmity into love? You tell him that he has the power to repent, and to love God; and urge him instantly to comply with his duty. Now we should be exceedingly obliged by any one, who would explain the process, by which a sinner changes the current of his affections. We have often tried the experiment, and have found ourselves utterly impotent to accomplish this work. Perhaps the zealous preacher of the doctrine of human ability, will say, it is as easy to love God, or easier, than to hate him. He can only mean, that when the heart is in that state in which the exhibition of the character of God calls forth love, the exercise of love in such

a soul, is as easy as the exercise of enmity in one of a different moral temperament. The ability to repent and love God then amounts to no more than this, that the human faculties when rightly exercised, are as capable of holy as of sinful acts, which no one, we presume, ever denied; but it is a truth which has no bearing on the point in hand. The impenitent sinner cannot sincerely will to change his heart, and if under the influence of such motives as he is capable of feeling, he does will a change of affection, the effect does not follow the volition. Those persons, therefore, who are continually preaching that men have every ability necessary to repent, are inculcating a doctrine at war with every man's experience; and directly opposed to the word of God; which continually represents the sinner as "dead," and impotent, and incapable of thinking even a good thought. But we shall be told, that it is a maxim of common sense, that whatever we are commanded to do, we must have power or ability to perform:—That it is absurd to suppose, that any man is under obligations to do, what he is unable to perform. Now, we are of opinion, that this is precisely the point, where these advocates of human ability mistake; and their error consists in the misapplication of the maxim already mentioned—which is true and self-evident when properly applied—to a case to which it does not belong. We have admitted, over and over, that this doctrine is universally true, in relation to the performance of actions consequent on volition; but we now deny, that this is true when applied to our dispositions, habits, and affections. We utterly deny, that in order to a man's being accountable and culpable for enmity to God, that he should have the power of instantly changing his enmity into love. If a man has certain affections and dispositions of heart which are evil, he is accountable for them; and the more inveterate and immovable these traits of moral character are, the more he is to be blamed, and the more he deserves to be punished. But as it is alleged, that the common judgment of man's moral faculty is, that he cannot be culpable unless he possesses the power to divest himself of his evil temper by an act of volition, we will state one or two cases, and leave it to every reader to judge for himself, after an impartial consideration of the facts.

In the first place, we take the case of a son, who being of a self-willed disposition, and having a great fondness for sensual pleasure and a strong desire to be free from restraint, has been led to cherish enmity to his father. The father we will sup-

pose to be a man of conscientious integrity; who, from natural affection, and from a regard to higher principles, wishes to perform his duty, by reproving, restraining, and correcting his child. But all this discipline, instead of working a reformation, has the effect of irritating the son, who every day becomes more stubborn and incorrigible; until he comes at length to look upon his father as a tyrannical master—an object of utter aversion. Hatred readily takes root in the bosom of such a one, and by the wicked counsels of ill advisers, this feeling is cherished, until by degrees it becomes so inveterate, that he cannot think of his father without being conscious of malignant feelings. The effect of such feelings will be to pervert every action of the hated person, however kind or just. Malice also causes every thing to be seen through a false medium. Now suppose this process to have been going on for years, the first question is, can this ungrateful son change, in a moment, these feelings of enmity and ill will, for filial affection? The impossibility is too manifest to require any discussion; he cannot. But, is he on account of this inability to change his affections, innocent? Surely the guilt of such a state of mind does not require that the person be, at once, or at all, able to change the state of his heart. And we maintain, that according to the impartial judgment of mankind, such a man would be the object of blame without regard to any ability to change his heart. And this is the case in regard to impenitent sinners. Their enmity to God and aversion to his law, is deep and inveterate; and they have neither ability nor will to change the temper of their minds; and they are not the less culpable on that account; for the nature of moral evil does not consist in that only which can be changed at will; but the deeper the malignity of the evil, the greater the sinfulness, and the more justly is the person exposed to punishment. We are of opinion, therefore, that the new doctrine of human ability, which is so much in vogue, is false and dangerous. And to corroborate this opinion, we remark, that men who are forsaken of God, and given over to believe a lie, and to work all uncleanness with greediness; or, who have committed the unpardonable sin, so that they cannot be “renewed again to repentance,” are surely unable to change their hearts, and yet they are exceedingly guilty.

The same thing may be strongly illustrated, by a reference to the devils. They are moral agents and act freely, for they continue to sin; but who would choose to assert, that they can

change their nature from sin to holiness, from enmity to love? But they possess, as fully as man, what has been called "natural ability." They have all the physical powers requisite to constitute them moral agents, and to perform the whole will of God; and are continually adding to their guilt, by their willing commission of sin. But it is impossible for the devils to become holy angels; and this one fact is sufficient to demonstrate, that a power to change the heart is not necessary to render a man guilty for continuing in sin. The very reverse comes nearer the truth. The more unable a sinner is to cease from his enmity, the deeper is his guilt: yet on the very same principles, on which it is argued, that it is as easy for man to love God as to hate him, it might be proved, that it was perfectly easy for the fallen angels to love God; or for the spirits shut up in the prison of despair to begin to love God, and thus disarm the law of that penalty which dooms them to everlasting death. If holiness is any thing real; if it has any foundation or principle in the mind in which it exists; and if this principle was lost by the fall of men and angels, then it is certain, that man cannot restore to his own soul the lost image of God. Again, they who insist upon it, that the sinner has all ability to repent and turn to God, and who so peremptorily and sternly rebuke the impenitent for not doing instantly what they have it in their power to do so easily, ought to set the example which these sinners should follow. Surely, the renewed man has the same kind of ability, and as much ability, to be instantly perfect in holiness, as the unregenerate man has to renew his own soul, or to change his own heart. Let the preacher give an immediate example of this ability by becoming perfectly holy, and we will consent that he preach this doctrine.

But the strongest argument against this notion of human ability, is derived from the scriptural doctrine of the necessity of regeneration, by the operations of the Holy Spirit. It is a maxim in philosophy, that no more causes should be admitted than are both true and sufficient to account for the effects. And it is equally clear, that if supernatural influence is necessary to repentance and other holy exercises, then man has not the ability to repent without such aid. It is manifestly a contradiction to assert, that man is able to commence the work of holiness by his own exertions; and yet that he cannot do this without divine aid. Every text, therefore, which ascribes regeneration to God, is a proof of man's inability to regenerate himself. Indeed, the very idea of a man's regenerating his

own heart is absurd: it is tantamount to a man's creating himself, or begetting himself. Besides, the Scriptures positively declare man's inability to turn to God, without divine aid. "No man," says the Lord Jesus, "can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." "Without me ye can do nothing." "Christ is exalted a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sins." "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves;" but see 2 Cor. iii. 5. Our sufficiency is of the Lord. Every thing is ascribed to the grace of God, and man, in Scripture, is continually represented as "dead in trespasses and sins"—as "blind," "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

It will be objected, with much confidence, that if man has no ability to repent, he cannot be blamed for not repenting. But this is only true, if he desires to repent, and is unable to do it. This, however, is not the case of the impenitent sinner. He does not wish to repent—if he did, there is no hindrance in his way. But his soul is at enmity with God, and this opposition is so deep and total that he has neither the will nor the power to convert himself to the love of God. But will his wickedness, therefore, excuse him, because it is so great, that it has left no desire nor ability to change his mind? Certainly, the judgment of mankind is sufficiently ascertained on this point, and is entirely different from this. The wretch who is so abandoned to vice, that he never feels a wish for reformation, is not, on this account, free from blame: so far from it, that **THE GREATER THE INABILITY, THE GREATER THE GUILT.** The more entirely a murderer has been under the influence of malice, the more detestable his crime. The object of all judicial investigation is to ascertain, first the fact, and then the motive; and the more deliberate, unmixed, and invincible the malevolence appears to have been, the more unhesitating is the determination of every juror, or judge, to find him guilty. It is the common sense of all men, that the more incorrigible and irreclaimable a transgressor, the more deserving is he of severe punishment. It cannot, therefore, be a fact, that men generally think, that where there is any kind of inability, there is no blame. The very reverse is true. And it will be found to be the universal conviction of

men, in all ages and countries, that a totally depraved character creates an inability to do good; and that the greater this inability the more criminal is the person who is the subject of it.

Another objection is, that if impenitent men are informed that they can do nothing, they will sit still and make no manner of exertion, but will wait until God's time, as it is certain all their efforts will be in vain, until God works in them to will and to do. To which we reply, that unregenerate men are ever disposed to pervert the truth of God, so as to apologize for their own negligence; but this must not hinder us from embracing it and preaching it; though this should teach us to exercise peculiar caution, when there is danger of mistake or perversion. Again, it answers no good end to set such persons to strive in their own strength, and sometimes fatally misleads them: for either they become discouraged, not finding their strength to answer to the doctrine of the preacher, or they are led to think that the exertions which they make, are acts of faith and repentance; and thus, without feeling their dependance on God, are induced to rely on their own strength. Now, the true system is, to exhort sinners to be found in the use of God's appointed means; that is, to be diligent in attendance on the word, and at the throne of grace. They should also be exhorted to repent and to perform all other commanded duties, but at the same time distinctly informed, that they need the grace of God to enable them rightly to perform these acts; and their efforts should be made in humble dependance on divine assistance. While they are reading, or hearing, or meditating, or praying, God may, by his Holy Spirit, work faith in their hearts, and while they are using the means of repentance, the grace of repentance may be bestowed upon them. We should not exhort men to perform any duty otherwise than as God has commanded it to be done; but we may exhort an unregenerate sinner to read and pray, for in attending on these means, he is making the effort to believe and to repent; and while engaged in the use of these external means, God may give a believing and penitent heart. Besides, we do not know when men cease to be unregenerate. They are often renewed before they are aware that they have experienced a saving change; and if we omit to exhort them to pray, &c. under the apprehension that they cannot perform the duty aright, we may be hindering the access of some of God's dear children to his presence. And in regard to those who pray with an unregenerate heart, we are persuaded that they do not,

by making the attempt to pray, sin so egregiously, as by omitting the duty altogether. If the principle on which some act in their treatment of the awakened, were carried out to its legitimate consequences, they should be told neither to plough nor sow; no, nor perform the common duties of justice and morality, because they sin in all these, as certainly as in their prayers.

It is thought, that inculcating the doctrine of the inability of sinners, has a tendency to lead them to procrastinate attention to their salvation, upon the plea that it is useless for them to strive, until God's grace shall be granted; and it has been admitted, that this abuse may be made of the doctrine; but is there no danger of abuse on the other side? When men in love with sin, are taught that they possess all necessary ability to turn to God, and that they can repent, at any moment, by a proper use of their own powers, will they not be led to postpone attention to the concerns of the soul, under the persuasion that it is a work which they can perform at any time, even on a death-bed? Will they not run the risk of being suddenly cut off, when they are informed, that in a moment, or in a very short time, they can give their hearts to Christ? In fact, this is precisely the practical system of every careless sinner. He knows that he is going astray at present; but then he flatters himself that, after enjoying his sinful pleasures awhile longer, he will give them all up, and become truly pious: and this common delusion is carried so far, that the secret thought of many is, that if on a death-bed, they should only be favoured with the exercise of reason for a short time, they can easily make their peace with God, and prepare for another world. Therefore, faithful ministers have felt it to be their duty to endeavour to dissipate this delusion, and to convince men that their hopes of future repentance are fallacious; and they found nothing more effectual to remove this dangerous self-confidence, than to insist on the utter helplessness and total inability of the sinner to convert his own soul. But now the strain of preaching which is heard from many, coincides most perfectly with the erroneous persuasion which ignorance of their depravity leads natural men to cherish. We are persuaded, therefore, that much evil will result from this new method of preaching respecting man's ability. The evil will be twofold: first, multitudes will be confirmed in their false persuasion of their ability to become truly religious whenever they please; and will, in this persuasion, go on presumptuously in their indul-

gence of sin, with the purpose to repent at some future day: the second evil will be, that multitudes, under superficial convictions, being told that they have the power to turn to God, will, upon entirely insufficient grounds, take up the opinion that they have complied with the terms of salvation, because they are conscious they have exerted such power as they possess; and thus, false hopes will be cherished, which may never be removed. We are of opinion, therefore, that what is cried up as "new light," in regard to the proper method of dealing with sinners, is really a dangerous practical error; or, if what is inculcated can, by any explanation, be reconciled with truth, yet this method of exhibiting it is calculated to mislead, and has all the pernicious effects of error.

The truth is, that no unregenerate man can change his own heart, and yet he is accountable for all its evil, and culpable for all the inability under which he labours. Man is a moral agent, and free in his sinful actions; that is, they are voluntary. He does what he pleases, and he wills what he pleases: but when his heart is fully set in him to do evil, there is no principle from which a saving change can take place. He must be renewed by the Spirit of God. He must be created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works.

ART. VII.—THE RELIGIOUS PROSPECTS OF FRANCE.

THE year which is now drawing to a close, has been one pregnant with momentous results to the French nation. We leave to others the discussion of the probabilities regarding the political destiny of this tumultuous people, and turn with greater pleasure to the tokens which are held forth, amidst popular commotion and ministerial discord, of living and reviving Christianity. Our imperfect file of the *Archives du Christianisme*, brings down the current history of the Reformed Church to the month of May, and it is impossible to look at these numbers, indicative, as we suppose, of the pervading spirit of evangelical Protestants, without observing that they are animated with a new and most cheering spirit of Christian hope. From a variety of interesting details, such signs of the times as these may be presented to our readers without comment. The press, which, day by day, is becoming a more