

T H E

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A COLLECTION OF SERMONS BY MINISTERS  
OF DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS.

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“In essentials, unity ; in non-essentials, liberty ; in all things, charity.”—*Augustine.*

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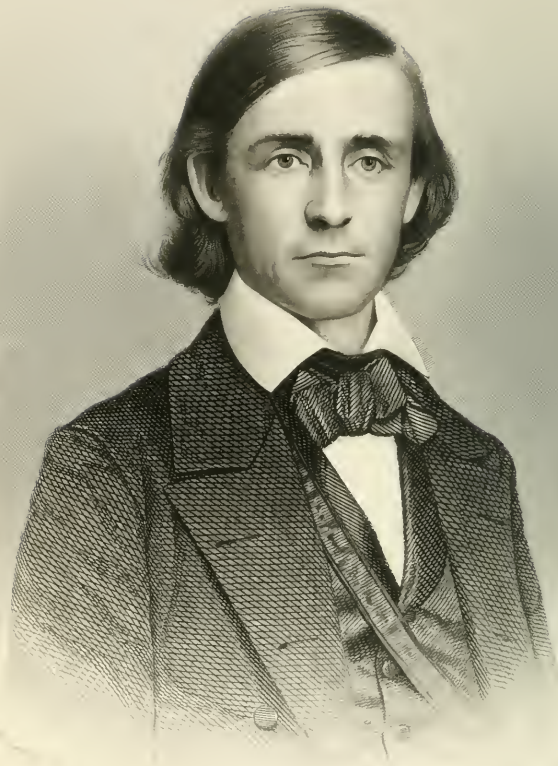
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*B. Sunderland*

## THE EVIL AFFECTING THE UNIVERSE.

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Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?—*Amos*, iii, 6.  
I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.—*Isaiah*, xlv, 7.

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.—*Genesis*, vi, 5.

The first of these passages has another reading to this effect: "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord not do somewhat?" This construction, taken with the quotation from *Genesis*, clearly implies the agency of the creature as well as of the Creator in reference to the existence of evil. In the passage from *Isaiah* however, God is distinctly represented as the Author of evil. These declarations apparently cast suspicion on the character and government of Jehovah. Is the evil of the universe indeed primarily of divine origination? Can it in all its forms be traced back to the Deity, and fastened upon Him as the only efficient cause of its production? How then, does this view consist with His infinite perfections, or how is it compatible with the responsibility of His rational creatures?

These questions bring us to consider one of the profoundest subjects that has ever engaged human attention—that of the *existence, nature and authorship of evil*—the *relations* of man to it—and the *relations* of God to it.

Now it is but little to say that, however evil may have originated, yet as a matter of fact both the divine and human agencies are inevitably connected with it. Of this great and solemn truth, the history of the world is full of the most amazing and admonitory examples. The ancient deluge and the subsequent crucifixion of

Jesus Christ have each, in their way, proclaimed the mighty but melancholy fact. The great centres of human population in every age have become the monuments of its reality. And everywhere and at all times the conflicts and disasters of the human race have only served to illustrate and impress the fearful fact of existing evil, and to confirm and manifest the equal truth, that man errs and suffers, while at the same time God is also displaying, in this identical series of events, the dispositions of His infinite mind.

In entering therefore, upon a somewhat closer examination of this subject, we shall dwell at present on the *three* following topics of discussion :

I. The nature of evil.

II. How creatures are connected with it.

III. How God is connected with it.

I. First then, as to the nature of evil, we observe that, so far as we can know anything concerning it, the idea of *evil* is presented to our apprehension in these three aspects :

1. *Moral evil*, or *sin*.

2. *Physical evil*, or *suffering*.

3. *Alternative evil*, or that evil which might have resulted from the choice of any other than the present system of the universe.

The conceptions of damage, hurt, injury, loss, mischief, pain, violence, and wrong, some or all of them underlie and form the basis or real groundwork of each of these three aspects of evil. We are somewhat at a loss how further or more clearly to express even our own sense of what this evil truly is. But if possible to make it plain in our meaning, we may remark, there is a divine will, there is a constituted order of nature, and there is an eternal and immutable distinction between right and wrong. Now to a sentient, spontaneous, intelligent, moral, spiritual, and accountable being constituted, conditioned, and developed, in just accordance with this divine will, this order of nature, and this immutable distinction between right and wrong—to such a being, that which is absolutely not to be desired is *evil*, that which is to be desired is *good*. We know of no better way of defining evil in the abstract, or of distinguishing it from good. And consequently, still more certainly, that must be evil at which God, in the divine sympathies and sensibilities of His infinite nature, reluctates.

Then, as to the aspect of moral evil or sin, we see at once that it is

and can be nothing more nor less than the want of conformity to, or the positive transgression of a moral law; and of course that it is and can be produced only by the proper agent or subject of such a law; and of course only by a being who must be, in his own nature, a free, intelligent, moral, and responsible creature. This being so, it is indispensable to a comprehension of the subject that we should have a clear conception of the possibilities and beginnings of moral evil, and of the only conditions of its origin and rise. You see plainly what it is—a violation of moral law—a departure from that spiritual order and consistency of things, which God has established in the constitution and administration of the existing universe. You see as plainly that it can only arise in the nature and out of the state or action of a free moral being, subject to moral law. And it is equally conclusive, that it must arise in the nature or from the mode of such a being, only upon those occasions which are of the essence of temptation, because the principles of creature mind and the proofs of our experience are such, that this moral evil cannot exist except as it is accompanied by a consciousness of the proximate causes which produced it. These proximate causes are the occasions of temptation, which temptation, as witnessed by the consciousness of the creature, may be present to the mind either from within or from without, and must therefore be, in agreement with the circumstances, either clothed with or divested of the quality of voluntariness. And thus again, temptation itself must be distinguished as of two kinds, when considered in reference to the subjects which hold it forth, or the objects out of which it springs. Temptation is voluntary or involuntary, according to the method of its presentation; but temptation is not in itself properly an evil, when separated from the element of voluntariness. It may be well to illustrate this distinction. When Satan came to tempt the Redeemer, it was on the part of the fallen angel a temptation voluntarily put forth. Hence we call it a *voluntary* temptation, not with reference to Christ, but only with reference to his adversary. But when Achan was tempted at the sight of the wedge of gold, that temptation, arising from an involuntary object, may be termed an *involuntary* temptation. It was contingent on the circumstances, and in itself had no moral quality. Thus we see the difference between these two classes of temptations, which together embrace all the forms of temptation of which it is possible for us to conceive.

Yet, whether the temptation be voluntary or involuntary, as now explained, the sin or act of demerit does not lie in the fact of being tempted, but only in essentially yielding to such temptation. Moral evil has not properly begun prior to the actual submission of the creature to the dominion of the temptation. Temptation, as we have seen in the instance of our Saviour, may arise upon a being purely innocent, and if repelled, makes the innocence of the person tempted even more conspicuous by virtue of the resistance.

These then are the conditions of moral evil—a moral law—a moral being subject to that law—temptations to a violation of the law, such temptations being either voluntary or involuntary, and arising either from within or without the moral being—and finally, an essential submission of the moral being, upon the occasion of the temptation, to that violation of the law in which the sin or moral evil essentially consists. This is all it seems possible for us at present to know of the rise and nature of this kind of evil. It remains only to add, on this point of our examination, that philosophically considered, the first temptation must have been *involuntary*, since any other supposition would necessitate an act of sin prior to that which must have been the first act, which of course is a self-contradiction.

The occurrence of moral evil lays the foundation for the further and consequent existence of physical evil or suffering, embraced in the distinct forms of *natural sequence*, *positive curse* and the *strict penalty of violated law*. Thus we have, in this view, all that constitutes the pain and disorder of the universe, as exhibited under the Creator's administration, or attested in the history of His creatures. So the natural sequence of the violation of moral law, operates mental alienation from the law and from its Author, and that corruption of nature which constitutes the spiritual death of the sinner. This occasions a liability to the infraction of natural laws, and to its corresponding damage or suffering. The positive curse is a superadded expression of the divine displeasure against sin. In the case of human beings, it comprises natural weakness, toil, weariness, decay and death, and may be regarded as a manifestation of the divine will, giving direction providentially to the certain results of moral evil, as those results are wrought out in the subordinate departments of the material creation. The strict penalty of violated moral law is that which may be termed the remediless and everlasting evil of the divine wrath, as inflicted on the incorrigible sinner in a future pun-

ishment and an endless hell. No part of this physical evil could have found introduction into the existing universe, had there been no sin.

The third kind of evil—which we have designated *alternative evil*, from the simple circumstance, that in the possibility of our conceptions, we may suppose it to have existed, had any other system of the universe been adopted essentially different from the present—embraces solely our ideas of what would or might have been either a defect or a redundancy in any such supposable economy. Imagine for a moment, that any other system had been chosen; we can easily conceive that there might have been left out of it the element of the creature's free agency. This must have been a defect, and as such an evil. Or there might have been engrafted into it severities even more than those which now actually exist, and this we may conceive to have been an excess such as would prove itself an evil. And so we might conceive numerous modifications of this alternative evil, which God has happily separated forever from the actually existing universe. But as this alternative evil, though immeasurably transcending in its possibilities all the realized evil ever existing or to exist in connection with the established universe, has been at the same time absolutely avoided, we may, in the present discussion, dismiss it from our further computation.

Such being the nature of evil in its three exhaustive aspects, it is impossible to conceive of any evil other than that which must be included under the one or the other of these primary forms. Whatever divisions may be made or terms employed to designate our notions of evil, it is evident that an ultimate analysis must trace each specific instance of evil back to one of the three conceptions which have now been specified. Having seen therefore, from the exposition already made, that the actual existence of the evil which afflicts the universe must of necessity in some manner complicate the agency of moral or spiritual beings in its origination and perpetuity, it remains to consider, as proposed, the method of this complication, both in respect of creatures, and especially of man, and also of the infinitely perfect Jehovah. This leads us to the second branch of the general discussion, which is—

II. The relation of creature agency to the actual evil of the universe, or a consideration of the manner in which angels and men are connected with it.



On this topic, our chief inquiry must be in reference to the blameworthiness or demerit of the relation in question, because it is evident, that on the proper determination of this point stands the whole weight of the responsibility of the introduction of evil into the universe. And though, as we shall hereafter see, we may not obtain a full solution of the difficulties of this subject, or discover a theodicy which is competent, in every imaginable aspect, to "vindicate the ways of God to man," we may at least show upon whom, in the existing system of the universe, the entire burden of the introduction of the evil which affects it, ought of right to rest, and does in fact repose.

Our proposition consequently is, that from the very nature of evil, and from the only possible ways in which it can be conceived to have arisen, the responsibility of its introduction into the universe lies alone upon the moral creatures of God. The blameworthiness of its existence rests solely with them. Accordingly it is clear, as a historic truth, that previous to the first sin of the first sinner, no trace of evil of any kind, was to be found in all the universe. But on the other hand, all that subsisted was good, and admirable, and to be desired. And if, in hypothesis, we take up our stand-point at any period antecedent to the first act of sin in the creature, and thence look over the stupendous fabric of the creation, we shall behold on every side, and without exception, displays of God's goodness, wisdom, and power. We shall see the countless monuments of beauty and grandeur, of peace and happiness, of perfection and glory, scattered throughout immensity, with nothing as yet existing to obscure the splendors or mar the mighty substance of this illimitable empire. We shall observe how, in this unperverted order of the vast economy, the tide of being rolls on majestically, and over all the realm of the unbounded monarchy, a sound of harmonies breaks forth so musical, so full of life and light and immortality, that not even the suspicion of evil shall enter upon this august panorama of unfallen things, as it sweeps around the throne of the eternal Father, from whose complaisant looks there ever flows a smile of approbation on all the creatures of His authorship.

Wherefore then, came evil? Whereat could it thrust itself into the goodly universe? We mark the free nature of angels and men, and we say at once, "there it crept in; there it got entrance, and there alone." Creature agency produced it, and the responsibility of its existence lies only on the sinner. The first appearance of evil

was an intrusion into the creation, in the form of sin—the disobedience and transgression of those “angels who kept not their first estate.” Had this motion of moral evil never risen out of the free nature of moral beings, all actual evil must have been unknown to the universe. And here let us observe more particularly, in tracing the inception of that evil which has really accrued under the divine government, that in the first angel that sinned, both the temptation and the act of submission to it must have arisen purely with himself, as he found himself conditioned when he sinned. There could have been no antecedent evil; there was no external or surrounding evil. It is therefore evident that no form of evil could have assailed him from without. The source of it was in himself, and there it burst up. If it be suggested here that he must have been the subject of temptation presented by the objects around him, we have already shown that such temptation would be divested of the attribute of voluntariness, and therefore not properly an evil in itself. That angel was a moral or spiritual being—the subject of a law that was “holy, just and good.” He was created perfect after his kind. His innocence was unexcepted, and his happiness complete. God had laid no necessity upon him that he should sin. He had placed him in no circumstances which ought of right to have coerced his act of sin. There he stood, in his original innocence, amid the most suitable corresponding external conditions, when lo! suddenly his heart changes, and the fearful lapse begins. Hard feelings and murmuring thoughts come swelling up, and black and damning purposes of rebellion go coursing in the soul. That was the inception of moral evil, and, so far as we are able to conceive of it at all, that was the manner of its introduction into the existing universe. That was the first transgression of the moral law, by a moral being voluntarily yielding himself upon the occasion of an involuntary temptation; and that was the first act of sin. It is plain, from the nature of the case, that no voluntary temptation at that time existed; for this would imply the presence of one who had sinned prior to the first sin, which is absurd. So that the first temptation must have involuntarily arisen with the first sinner, in view of the surrounding objects, and of his own condition as affected by them. But suppose that under the presence of the temptation so arising, it had gone no farther with him, moral evil would still have been shut out, because the being tempted in such a manner was not itself the carrying away of his innocence,

nor the subversion of his integrity, but rather became instead a conspicuous occasion for the additional display of virtue. But this temptation was, as a matter of fact, strangely followed by submission to an act of sin. The creature fully yielded. It was a motion of his free nature, and through that movement evil got a foothold into the great empire of God.

Now there was no need of opening this door; there was no necessity for such an occurrence—absolutely none. Nothing hitherto derived from God constrained it, but on the contrary, everything so derived put discountenance upon it. Nor was the finite reason less positively opposed to it, while firmness of resolution might forever have barred it out. Temptation might have pried with all its keys for the ingress of moral evil, but temptation would have been baffled at every turn, had only the creature set the watch, and with an unwavering will, looked stern and defiant on every beckoning attitude of solicitation. But creature agency betrayed its trust, and ever since the evil, which first then found a lodgment in the empire of Jehovah, has been perpetuated and extended in the free action of rebellious creatures. The conclusion is inevitable. The blameworthiness of evil lies wholly with God's sinful subjects. Their *relation* to it is one of responsibility and guilt. They have become thus fearfully complicated with it, and must bear the whole demerit of its introduction, as to the past—while, as to the future, they must be either wholly separated from it, or overwhelmed and ruined by it. Such being the connection of angels and men with existing evil, we proceed to consider the third general topic, which is—

III. The relation of the divine agency to the evil of the universe, or the sense in which God may be regarded as connected with it, and His designs respecting it.

From what has already been shown, it appears that the blameworthiness of evil belongs exclusively to those creatures who have sinned; and therefore we may assume, once for all, that the Deity holds no relationship to evil, in any sense derogatory to the infinite perfections of His character. He cannot be censured on account of its existence, because it is evident that He is not properly responsible for its introduction. But it may be said, if God had not chosen and actualized the present system, the existing evil might have been unknown. Of course, we answer; but then in that case, what we have termed the alternative evil must necessarily have existed, and that

may have been vastly greater than all actual evil. And moreover, if the principle be admitted, that a superior being should do absolutely nothing, because some inferior being, erring from the law of right, may take occasion to pervert the innocent works of that superior, and so to let in evil where before no evil existed, then there is a necessity which, according to the logical requisitions of the principle avowed, must compel the instant blotting out of the universal structure, and the subsidence of all its products into the primeval nothingness. "The King eternal, immortal and invisible," must sit alone upon a senseless throne, wielding a barren sceptre over the solitudes of a depopulated immensity. But from such a conclusion the understanding itself recoils, because the principle is false, and its fruition vicious.

If then, the connection of the divine agency with actual evil be wholly separated from the character of blameworthiness, it is essential to consider in what method this relation of Jehovah to the present evil actually subsists, and with what purposes He proceeds to administer His government in view of it. In the statement of our hypothesis upon this subject, we shall submit the question upon the following series of propositions :

1. God chose and actualized the present existing universe, foreknowing that the present evil would exist.

2. He purposed, in connection with all the other constituent phenomena of the universe, to permit it to exist—that is to say, foreseeing the liability to evil, as resulting from the constitution and development of the chosen system, He designed to tolerate its actual existence, in view of the manner in which it must arise, and of the possibilities that would result, in the order of nature, subsequent to the event of its actual occurrence.

3. He purposed, upon the factivity of its introduction under His government, either to overrule or to meet it with such positive constraints and penalties as to manifest forever to the universe its self-destructive nature. In this way, the evil of which He becomes the direct and positive Author is not moral evil, but that natural or constitutional evil which, in a compensatory system like that of the present universe, is seen to be necessary for the proper treatment of such moral evil as may spring from the free nature of moral subjects, and which therefore God does originate, in the two-fold aspect of His disciplinary and punitive governance.

4. In creating the present universe, God did not desire the actual evil with it, as in itself considered. Nor did He necessitate the evil which was first to mar the beautiful order of the creation, nor was it any part of the proper and essential motive which may be supposed to have led Him to the choice of the existing system.

5. God may be said to have ordained the present universe in spite of the actual evil which attends it, and because, for a final motive, of the vastly greater and more glorious objects which are apposite to the system itself, and can only be attained through its existence and operation.

6. In all this, it is not possible to perceive that there is anything traceable to the divine agency as its sole and proper moral cause, which is not manifestly "holy, just and good." Neither in the designs of God, nor in His overt action, can there be found anything which looks like the transcript of a vicious nature. The evil which He purposely permits, originates in the action of responsible creatures. The evil which He positively creates is, in the order of nature, but a consequence of that moral evil which began with the first sinner, and is therefore, so far from derogating from the divine character, only another though fearful element of the perfect vindication of Jehovah.

In further illustration of these positions, we are not to overlook the great primordial features of the divine manifestation exhibited in the present constitution of the universe. God has made bright and blessed worlds. He has made innocent and happy creatures. He has given them righteous laws. He has supplied all necessary provisions, and maintained all suitable vigilance for the realization of one unbroken order of beneficence and perfection, throughout the entire extent of His immense dominions. How or when therefore, did He desire the coming in of evil? How or when did He favor or foster it? How or when did He put forth one single manifestation of His character which offers the least shadow of evidence that He could authorize or sanction it? But it is alleged that God permitted sin in others. And what was this but permitting them to use their freedom as they would, even though He had built around them a wall of warning, and established every moral security against the contingency of their evil choice? To have done more than this for the prevention of evil, He must have arrested the moral action of His creatures, and totally obliterated their moral nature. The

question here becomes fundamental to the perpetuity of the moral universe. Shall the creatures of God retain their spiritual being and their free agency? Then must they, on the strictest principles of philosophy, be permitted to sin, if they will sin against light and law and eternal penalty. But it is alleged that God foreknew that these creatures would sin, when He made them. And what was this but the necessity of His omniscience? Can He be blamed for knowing all things? Or could He of right be estopped from the work of creation, by the knowledge of the coming evil? But God actually inflicts pain upon the sinner. He has prepared a place of everlasting torment for the finally incorrigible offender. And can He be blamed for this when, by reason of His character as Ruler and Judge, and of the executive office of supreme administration, He is bound to uphold and protect those interests and laws of the universe which sin assails? Under the divine government, hell is the philosophical result of sin, no less than the positive appointment of God as the retribution for violated law. The question of the divine relation to moral evil is reduced to this—that God's purpose is not to prevent its inception and specific progress within the limits which the moral freedom of His creatures furnishes—and that beyond this, He purposes to overrule or to punish.

But inasmuch as the punishment of the sinner is itself an evil, in the sense of suffering, it belongs to this discussion to show that so far from impeaching God's infinite perfections, the pain inflicted upon moral delinquents could not be withheld or averted upon any theory consistent with those perfections. It must be remembered that the divine agency is continually presented in a two-fold aspect—first in His work as the Author and Maker of the universe, and again in his office as the Upholder and Governor of the universe. In the character of Creator, God elected and ordained a system liable to evil, foreknowing that the evil would accrue. But the evil which He thus foreknew was moral evil—the sin of moral beings. In this remote sense only can the divine agency be said to be related to the origin of evil, since, if God had not created *anything*, moral evil could not have existed. But in that case, the alternative evil could not have been evaded; and this might have been a result far worse than that which has actually transpired. It is true this statement of the case at once brings forward, to the perplexity of our understanding, a formidable series of ulterior difficulties, which no theodicy

ever yet devised by the human intellect has proved capable of solving. Of these difficulties, the following may be taken as examples :

1. The question of the modification of the present universe from what it now is, to the extent of rendering the liability to evil impossible. Why could this not have been done? Is not the assumption gratuitous, that there is no middle ground between the existing universe with its contingent or actual evil, and no universe at all?

2. A suggestion from the revealed fact in the history of the moral universe, that some of God's moral creatures have never lost "their first estate," but have continued in the perpetual goodness of their spiritual life. The question is, why could not God have secured, upon the same or upon similar principles, an immunity from evil to all His moral subjects? Upon what basis of right reason can this difference in the condition of moral beings be explained? And still further, considering the doctrine of cause and effect in the strict method of philosophy, how could evil come to exist as an *effect* at all, while there was no prior evil *cause* to produce it? If like causes produce like effects, how is the enigma of this evident solecism to be resolved?

3. A derogation from the perfections of the Deity, apparently arising from the fact that *something* seems to exist in the present universe which was not desired by Him, which did not emanate from Him, which came *to be* in the face of all His wisdom, goodness and power, and which He must in some form or other contend with throughout the endless ages of eternity. This something is moral evil. It is the direct result of the action of moral beings, who are themselves the creatures and therefore the effects of God. This moral evil is consequently the effect of an effect, immediately traceable to the great First Cause; or if it have no first cause, it then must either spring from the second cause in independence of the first, in which case an antagonism is erected against God which He cannot remove—or it must exist without any cause whatever, that is be self-existent and therefore eternal and unchangeable. It would thus become an incident of immensity, like time and space, and hence be divested of its moral quality altogether. So that viewed in whatsoever light, the fact that it exists at all, when carried to its ultimate analysis, presents a problem which, in all the attempts of man to solve it, still remains as totally mysterious as ever.

4. A fourth difficulty is disclosed in the fact that every hypothesis yet constructed by human thought respecting this subject, turns out to be upon close inspection, that purest of all metaphysical inanities—a *petitio principii*—a “begging of the premises,” and “reasoning in the circle.” The divine perfection is what is sought to be proved, starting from the stand-point of existing evil. If God *could* prevent it, and *would* not, how is He infinitely good? If He *would* prevent it, but *could* not, how is He infinitely powerful? The final result of our rationality upon these questions is, that we take for granted what we propose to prove, and we prove our proposition by what we take for granted. A single formula contains it all—God is infinitely good, notwithstanding the existence of evil; and though evil exists, still God is infinitely good. This is the substance of all that the human intellect has yet contributed towards the final disposition of the subject in question. And indeed it seems incompetent to do more than this; for whatever hypothesis may be assumed, or whatever philosophy adopted, it appears to result from the relations of the finite to the infinite, that every step in the advance of human knowledge discloses further points of equal mystery, and gives rise to new questions which, though couched in other forms, still embody the same unsolved problem.

It is not therefore, our object in this discourse to attempt any explanation of the difficulties thus suggested. It would be at best but a futile task. Many have tried it, and all have signally failed in the effort. The theories of Origen and of Swedenborg may stand as specimens of the whole. All therefore we are seeking to do, is to show how, or in what manner, the divine agency stands related to the present actual evil of the universe, and not to furnish the slightest satisfaction as to the ultimate reasons of such a complication. The *why* and the *wherefore* of the actual phenomena, and their philosophical reconciliation, are subjects lying wholly beyond the scope of our present rationality, and so we are unable to incorporate their elements into any authoritative demonstration.

But when once it is admitted that moral evil began with God's moral creatures in the way we have supposed, then it is comparatively easy to comprehend the fact that the divine agency is and should be connected with such evil, either for overruling or punishment—and the further fact that in His office of Upholder and Governor of the universe, God does so treat it. And in so dealing



with it, He does often directly and positively create or cause to exist the corresponding physical evil. God does directly and positively decree and purpose to bring evil upon the offender. He does actually give to the earth its barrenness, to the winds and waves their fury, to war its havoc, to famine and pestilence their fangs, and to death its fearful sting. He does undoubtedly arm the elements with destructive energy, either as the superadded expression of His anger against sin, or as the required discipline of those whom He would reclaim, or finally to pay off in just and judicial retribution the score of the offender. In this clear and administrative sense, the Lord does create evil. So far as we can see, He would be blameworthy if He did not create it, for as the Supreme Ruler of the universe He is bound by every high consideration to the *punishment* of wrong-doing so soon as it is clearly demonstrated that its *overruling* is impossible. In all this we discover at last the relation of Jehovah to the actual evil of the universe. It is a relation purely *permissive, reformatory, or punitive*—not one which as to Himself is condemnable or blameworthy.

Thus from the nature of evil as it actually exists, and the relations which God and His creatures hold to it, we must conclude that the beginning of actual evil is sin in the free nature of moral beings. We know nothing of actual evil prior to this, either in God or the universe. The existence of evil demands such a course on the part of the Deity as shall consist with the desigus of His infinite perfections. This last necessity God fulfils, first with a view to the final extirpation of evil, and secondly to concentrate and confirm what may not be thus extirpated, within the limits of that place and condition which He has prepared for it, to remain forever.

If, then, there be any consistency or correctness in the view now presented, we see that the whole matter of evil in its origin is the intrusion into the universe of an unwelcome visitant. It came in by no positive purpose or personal act of Jehovah. On the contrary, His whole endeavor seems to be to eject it. The sinner would keep it in the system, corroding, convulsing, destroying. It becomes therefore, in the order of nature, a question for practical treatment. If it cannot be cured, it must be separated from so much of the moral universe as may be possible in the premises. The great Physician must either purge or cut it out. He must therefore countervail sin by suffering. And yet the physical evil so inflicted shall be none

the less bitter, because God is just in dispensing it. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." For He it is who can kindle the penal fire and awake the awful ministers of avenging justice—He it is who is roused and indignant upon every movement of sin, whose forbearance will not always last, and whose terrors once inflamed shall burn to the lowest hell—He it is who declares by the utter inviolability of His own emphatic oath, "the soul that sinneth it shall die." If sin then cannot be overruled, it must be met with punishment awful and remediless.

From the exposition now made in reference to the evil of the universe, we may derive some lessons of the gravest import to our present and everlasting well-being.

1. In the first place, we have the spectacle of a universe invaded by evil with which the Supreme Power of the government proceeds to grapple for its overthrow. In this great conflict, all the elements of the divine empire are intensified, and all its features brought out into bold relief. At every changing scene of the august exhibition, there is a further confirmation of the great fundamental truths of divine Revelation, and of those awful verities of our existence which every individual of the human race must meet. It is the movement of an empire whose Ruler is so sovereign, and whose issues so established, that there can be to the sinner nowhere either evasion or impunity. "Be sure your sin will find you out," is the fearful sentence which burns along the pathway of every flying offender. In one of two ultimate objects this inquest shall be laid. The every sin of every sinner shall hunt after him till he is discovered, either first, that he may repent and be restored; or if this shall fail, then secondly, that he may be consigned to the punishment that is everlasting and condign. This is the solemn ordinance of Heaven. The conditions of God's dealing with His sinful creatures are plainly stated. "When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquities, for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die." Again: "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Therefore, will I judge you, every man according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God. Wherefore turn yourselves and live ye." These are the principles of the divine administration, and to give them an everlasting power in a world of rebellious subjects, God has further made the crowning display of all His works in the Gospel of His Son Christ Jesus.

2. We have therefore a second impressive lesson in the plan of Redemption brought to light in the Scriptures. Upon this gracious economy God has gone forth actually to accomplish in our world all that can be done for the cessation of evil, up to the point beyond which the absolute destruction of the free nature of His moral creatures is all that would be left to be enacted. Up to this point, God has in the Gospel done everything possible in the premises to reform and deliver men from evil. He has established another covenant. He has initiated another dispensation. He has given to sinful men the written revelation of His will. He has provided an all-sufficient atonement for their sins. He has reprieved them throughout the entire period of this probationary life. He has upheld them by His providence, admonished them by His Word, instructed them by His Spirit, and in every way conditioned them upon terms most favorable to their recovery from the dominion of evil. He has afforded to them every facility, and bestowed upon them every blessing, of the glorious economy of salvation. He has given them His Son, "to die, the just for the unjust;" and with *Him*, also, God has provided the ordinances of the church and the means of grace. In manifold ways He conducts the ministration of mercy, while everywhere is uttered the solemn expostulation, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" And if, when the period of respite has expired, when at last it is discovered that the sinner has rejected all the overtures of the Gospel, and has resolutely persisted in the way and in the prosecution of evil, shall "it be thought a thing incredible" that God should abandon him to his own chosen ways, and "fill him with the fruit of his own doings?" It is this result to which the guilty must indeed be brought at last. And what a visitation of evil must that be which bears in its execution the fearful weight of a rejected Gospel, a despised Saviour, abused privileges, and squandered opportunities, and which shall roll the awful curse of "in-

dignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," over the human spirit forever!

3. There is one further serious lesson to be derived from this view of existing evil. We have already seen that evil was first originated by the action of God's moral subjects, and that by the same action it is now maintained. Since, then, it exists by creature agency, it is emphatically by the same agency that it must be made to cease. There is a way in which our world might be entirely separated from every vestige of the evil which afflicts it. Were everything now to cease from sin, and henceforth take a steady stand for God and holiness, this would finish the disorder, and finally efface from human conditions all that now makes up the curse and the catastrophe of the creation. What we have to do is just to retrace our steps, drag back the evil we have caused, and thrust it out again. If it is to go out at all, it must disappear by the same door through which it was brought in. If it is to go out at all, it must be made to vanish during the period of man's probation. It must go while yet repentance is possible, and pardon and peace may be had at the seat of that Sovereign Mercy over which there seems to shine a sentence of living comfort—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." It must go now, "in this accepted time, in this day of salvation." It must go when as yet God is putting forth His power to allay the terrors it has spread around, and to break its deadly spell, and to deliver its unhappy subjects from the captivity of their guilt.

Then, my fellow-men, there is in all this a pressure of obligation and of duty which lies on every one of us, so great as scarcely to be borne. If we have heard the voice of God calling us to our great work of "ceasing to do evil and learning to do well," how shall we contrive to postpone for a single hour the action that must be taken in our deliverance and salvation? How shall we still dwell upon our earthly projects, in ruinous indifference to all these mightier verities of the government of God? How shall we, in utter madness, still cleave to the great iniquity, and still swing the red scimitars of sin, reeking in the fresh-drawn blood of the Messiah, in the face of the omnipotent Jehovah? The day shall come when we must be hurried through the iron gateway, to behold, on the other side, the august phase of irreversible destiny. No present quietude, no earthly stays, shall hold us back. But as we ride insensible upon the eternal wave, the bitter truth may then first break upon us, that "sin, when

it is finished, bringeth forth death." And then shall the furies of an undone existence make each man to know the height and depth and the length and breadth of that evil which he has authorized and perpetuated, in spite of all the reclamations that flow from the Redeemer's Cross. Oh! then, while yet the catastrophe delays, and all the wretchedness of our estate may be disposed of in another way, let the summons of Jehovah be instantly obeyed. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Amen.