

LECTURE XX.

DECREES OF GOD

SYLLABUS.

1. How do Theologians classify the acts of God?
Turretin, Loc. iv, Qu. 1. Dick, Lect. 34.
2. What is God's Decree? Wherein different from Fate? What is the distinction between permissive and efficacious?
Conf. of Faith, ch. 3. Turretin, *ubi supra*, and Loc. vi, Qu. 2. Dick, *ubi supra*. Calv. Inst., bk. iii, ch. 21.
3. Establish the following properties of the decree, (a) Unity, (b) Eternity, (c) Universality, embracing especially the future acts of free agents, (d) Efficiency, (e) Absoluteness from conditions, (f) Freedom, and (g) Wisdom.
Turretin, Loc. iv, Qu. 2, 3 and 4. Hill, bk. iv, ch. 7, § 1-3. Dick, *ubi supra*. Watson's Theol. Inst., ch. 26, § 1. Knapp, § 32. Witsius on Cov., bk. iii, ch. 4. Dr. S. Hopkins' System, Vol. i, p. 136-153.
4. How may the objections be answered; (a) That the Decree destroys free agency and responsibility; (b) Supersedes the use of means; (c) Makes God the author of Sin.
Turretin, as above. Dick, Lects. 34 and 36.

OUR study now leads us from the consideration of God's nature to His acts. Theologians have usually classified them

under three sorts. The 1st are God's immanent eternal acts, which are wholly subjective. These are the generation of the Son, and procession of the Holy Ghost. 2d, are God's immanent and eternal acts having reference to objects out of Himself. This class includes His decree; an unchangeable and eternal act of God never passing over so as to cease to be His act, yet being relative to His creatures. 3d, are God's transient acts towards the universe external to Himself, including all His works of creation and providence done in time.

"The decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

2. Decree proved by God's intelligence.

Nature and Revelation concur to teach us that God is a Being of infinite intelligence, and of will. The eternal object of His cognition, as we saw, when investigating His omniscience, is nothing less than the whole of the possible; for the wisdom and selection displayed in the creation of the actual, show that

there was more before the Divine Mind, than what was effectuated. But when we inquire for the ground of the difference between God's natural and His voluntary knowledge, we find no other than His volition. That is, the only way in which any object can by any possibility have passed from God's vision of the possible into His foreknowledge of the actual, is by His purposing to effectuate it Himself, or intentionally and purposely to permit its effectuation by some other agent whom He expressly purposed to bring into existence. This is clear from this fact. An effect conceived in *posse* only rises into actuality by virtue of an efficient cause or causes. When God was looking forward from the point of view of His original infinite prescience, there was but one cause, Himself. If any other cause or agent is ever to arise, it must be by God's agency. If effects are embraced in God's infinite prescience, which these other agents are to produce, still, in willing these other agents into existence, with infinite prescience, God did virtually will into existence, or purpose, all the effects of which they were to be efficient. That this prescience is all-embracing, the Scriptures assert in too many places. (Acts xv : 18 ; Is. 42 : 9 ; xlvii : 10 ; Ps. cxlvii : 5 ; Jno. xxi : 17. Hence His purpose must extend to all that is, or is to be effectuated.

The same conclusion follows by a more popular reasoning from God's power ; that power extends to all beings and events, and is the source of all existence. Now it is impossible for us to conceive how an intelligent Being can set about producing anything, save as He has the conception of the thing to be produced in His mind, and the intention to produce it in His will. Least of all can we attribute an unintelligent and aimless working to God. But if He is concerned in the production of all things, and had an intelligent purpose with reference to all which He produced, there is His decree ; and His perfections, as we shall see, forbid our imputing any beginning to it. So, the sovereignty of God, which regulates all the universe, the doctrine of His providence, so fully asserted in Scripture, and His concurring perfections of knowledge and wisdom, show that He must have a purpose as to all things. See Eph: i : 11 ; Ps. xxxiii : 11. Other passages, extending this purpose specifically to various departments of events, and especially to those concerning which the decree is most contested, will be cited in other connections. These also are appropriate here.

The question whether God's decrees abide in Him essentially or accidentally, is but the same with that which we saw raised concerning the simplicity of the divine essence. The scholastic divines, in order to defend their metaphysical notion of this, said that God knows, feels, wills, &c., by His essence, or that God's knowledge is but His essence knowing, &c. As we then

By His Power.
Is the Decree in God Essentially ?

concluded concerning His knowledge, so I now say concerning His purpose. If it is meant that God's purpose is but God purposing, and as abstracted from Him, is but an abstraction, and not an existent thing, I fully concur. But in the same sense, the purpose of a human soul is but that soul purposing. The difference of the two cases is, that God's purpose is immanent and immutable, the man's evanescent and mutable. To make the decree of God's essence in any other sense, is to give it essence; to make it a mode of the divine subsistence. And this trenches hard by the awful verge of pantheism. For if the decree is but a mode of the divine subsistence, then its effectuation in the creature's existence must still have the same essence, and all creatures are but modes of God, and their acts of God's acts. The decrees are not accidents with God, in the sense that, being the result of God's immutable perfections, they cannot change nor fail, but are as permanent as God's essence.

The doctrine of God's decree has been often impugned as no better than the Stoic's Fate. The modern, and indeed, the ancient interpreters of their doctrine, differ as to their meaning. Some, as Seneca, seem to represent fate as no other than the intelligent, eternal purpose of the Almighty. But others describe it as a physical necessity, self-existent and immanent in the links of causation themselves, by which effect is evolved out of cause according to a law eternally and necessarily existent in the Universe and all its parts. To this necessity Gods are as much subject as men. This definition is more probably the true one, because it agrees with a pantheistic system, and such Stoicism was. Now it is obvious, that this fate necessitates God as much as man, and that not by the influence of His own intelligence and perfections, but by an influence physical and despotic. Whereas our view of God's purpose makes it His most free, sovereign, wise and holy act of choice. This fate is a blind necessity; God's decree is intelligent, just, wise and benevolent. Fate was a necessity, destroying man's spontaneity. God's decree, in purposing to make and keep man a free agent, first produced and then protects the exercise of it.

God's decree "foreordains whatsoever comes to pass;" there was no event in the womb of the future, the futuration of which was not made certain to God by it. But we believe that this certainty is effectuated in different ways, according to the different natures of God's creatures. One class of effects God produces by His own immediate agency, (as creations, regenerations, inspirations,) and by physical causes, which are continually and immediately energized by His power. This latter subdivision is covered by what we call the laws of material nature. As to these, God's purpose is called effective, because He Himself effects the results, without the agency of other intelligent agents. The

Fate, What?

God's decree effective or permissive.

other class of effects is, the spontaneous acts of rational free agents other than God. The being and powers of these are derived from and dependent on God. But yet He has been pleased to bestow on them a rational spontaneity of choice, which makes them as truly agents, sources of self-determined agency, in their little, dependent sphere of action, as though there were no sovereign over them. In my theory of the will, I admitted and claimed as a great truth of our consciousness, that man's action is spontaneous, that the soul is self-determined (though not the faculty of willing) in all its free acts, that the fountain of the volition is in the soul itself; and that the external object of the action is but the occasional cause of volition. Yet these spontaneous acts God has some way of directing, (only partially known to us) and these are the objects of His permissive decree. By calling it permissive, we do not mean that their futurity is not certain to God; or that He has not made it certain; we mean that they are such acts as He efficiently brings about by simply leaving the spontaneity of other free agents, as upheld by His providence, to work of itself, under incitements, occasions, bounds and limitations, which His wisdom and power throw around. To this class may be attributed all the acts of rational free agents, except such as are evoked by God's own grace, and especially, all their sinful acts.

The properties of God's decree are, 1st, Unity. It is one act of the divine mind; and not many. This view is at least suggested by Scripture, which speaks of it usually as a *πρόθεσις*, a "purpose," a "counsel." It follows from the nature of God. As His natural knowledge is all immediate and cotemporaneous, not successive, like ours, and His comprehension of it all infinitely complete always, His purpose founded thereon, must be a single, all comprehensive and simultaneous act. Besides, the whole decree is eternal and immutable. All therefore must co-exist together always in God's mind. Last, God's plan is shown, in its effectuation, to be one; cause is linked with effect, and what was effect becomes cause; and influences of events on events interlace with each other, and descend in widening streams to subsequent events; so that the whole complex result is interconnected through every part. As astronomers suppose that the removal of one planet from our system would modify more or less the balance and orbits of all the rest, so the failure of one event in this plan would derange the whole, directly or indirectly. God's plan is, never to effectuate a result apart from, but always by, its own cause. As the plan is thus a unit in its effectuation, so it must have been in its conception. Most of the errors, which have arisen in the doctrine, have come from the mistake of imputing to God that apprehension of His purpose in successive parts, to which the limitations of our minds confine us, in conceiving of it.

3. Properties — The decree a unit.

2. The decree is eternal. One may object: that God must exist before His decree, the subject before its act. I reply, He exists before it only in the order of production, not in time. For intellection is His essential state, and His comprehension of His purpose may be as eternal as Himself. The sun's rays are from the sun, but measuring by duration, there were rays as early as there was a sun. It has been objected that some parts of the decree are consequent on other parts, and cannot therefore be equally early. I reply, the real sequence is only in the events as effectuated, not in the decree of them. The latter is a co-existent unit with God, and there is no sequence of parts in it, except in our feeble minds. It is said the comprehension of the possible must have gone before in the divine mind, in order that the determination to effectuate that part which commended itself to the divine wisdom, might follow. I reply: God does not need to learn things deductively, or to view them piecemeal and successively; but His infinite mind sees all by immediate intuition and together; and in seeing, concludes. The most plausible objection is, that many of God's purposes must have been formed in time, because suspended on the acts of other free agents to be done in time; e. g., Deut. xxviii: 2, 15; Jer. xviii: 10. The answer is, that all these acts, though contingent to man, were certainly foreknown to God.

Having thus cleared away objections, we might argue very simply: If God had an intention to act, before each act, when was that intention born? No answer will be found tenable till we run back to eternity. For, God's knowledge was always perfect, so that He finds out nothing new, to become the occasion of a new plan. His wisdom was always perfect, to give Him the same guidance in selecting means and ends. His power was always infinite, to prevent any failure, or successful resistance, which would cause Him to resort to new expedients. His character is immutable; so that He will not causelessly change His own mind. There is therefore nothing to account for any addition to His original plan. But we may reason more comprehensively. It is, as we saw, only God's purpose, which causes a part of the possible to become the actual. As the whole of God's *scientia simplicis intelligentiæ* was present to Him from eternity, a reason is utterly wanting in Him, why any part of the decree should be formed later than any other part.

And to this agree the Scriptures: Is. xlvi: 10; Matt. xxv: 34; 1 Cor. ii: 7; Eph. i: 4; 2 Thess. ii: 13; 2 Tim. i: 9; 1 Pet. i: 20. On these, two remarks should be made. Although they do not expressly assert the eternity of all God's decrees, several of them do assert the eternity of the very ones most impugned, His decrees concerning events dependent on free agent. In the language of Scripture, to say a thing was done

"before the formation of the world," is to say it is from eternity, because with the creation of the universe began successive duration. All before this is the measureless eternity. In conclusion, I add the express assertion of Acts xv: 18.

3. The decree is universal, embracing absolutely all creatures, and all their actions. No nominal Christians contest this, except as to the acts of free agents, which the Arminians, but especially the Socinians, exempted from God's sovereign decree, and the latter heretics from His foreknowledge. We have seen that God's foreknowledge is founded on His foreordination. If then we prove that God has a perfect foreknowledge of all future events, we shall have virtually proved that He has foreordained them. The Socinians are more consistent than the Arminians here, in that they deny both to God. They define God's omniscience as His knowledge of all the cognizable. All the future acts of free-agents, say they, cannot be foreknown, because a multitude of them are purely contingent; the volitions springing from a will in *equilibrio*. It is therefore no derogation to God's understanding, that He does not foreknow all of them, any more than it would be to the goodness of an eye, that it does not see what as yet does not exist. When free agents perform acts unforeseen to God, His wisdom, say they, provides Him with a multitude of resources, by which He overrules the result, and still makes them concur substantially (not absolutely) with His wise and good plans.

Now, in opposition to all this, we have shown that the future volitions of free agents are none of them among the unknowable; because none contingent to God. We argue farther that God must have foreordained, and so foreknown all events, including these volitions: (a.) Because, else, His providence would not be sovereign, and His independence and omnipotence would be impugned. We have seen that the course of events is a chain, in which every link has a direct or remote connection with every other. Into a multitude of physical events, the volitions of free agents enter as part causes; and if God has not a control over all these, He could not have over the dependent results. His government would be a capricious patchwork of new expedients. Because He could not control everything, He would not be absolutely sure of controlling anything, for all are interdependent. (b.) God's knowledge would receive continual accretions, and hence His feelings and plans would change with them; His immutability would be gone. (c.) Prophecy concerning the acts of free agents would have been impossible. For unless all the collateral links of causation are under God's control, it may be that He will be unable to control a single result. But a multitude of the acts of the proudest, most arrogant and rebellious men were exactly and confidently predicted,

Includes the volitions
of free agents.

of your Nebuchadnezzars, Pharaohs, Cyrus, &c., &c. To this last agree the Scriptures: Eph. i: 10, 11; Rom. xi: 33; Heb. iv: 13; Rom. ix: 15, 18; Acts xv: 18; xvii: 26; Job xiv: 5; Is. xlvi: 10. Men's volitions, especially including the evil. Eph. ii: 10; Acts ii: 23; iv: 27, 28; Ps. lxxvi: 10; Prov. xvi: 4, 33; Dan. iv: 34, 35; Gen. xlv: 5; Is. x: 5, 15; Josh. xi: 20; Prov. xx: 24; Is. xlv: 7; Amos iii: 6; Ps. cvii: 17; 1 Sam. ii: 25; 2 Sam. xvi: 10; 1 Kgs. xii: 15, 24; 2 Kgs. xxvi: 2, 3, 20. Add all those texts where the universality of God's providential control is asserted: for Providence is but the execution of the decree.

4. Nearly akin to this is the remark that the decree is efficient. By this I mean that God's purpose is in every case absolutely sure to be effectuated. Nearly all the arguments adduced under the last head apply here: God's sovereignty, God's wisdom, His independence, and the dependence of all other things on Him, the "immutability of His counsel," and of His knowledge and other attributes, the certainty of His predictions, all demand that "His counsel shall stand, and He shall do all His pleasure." See Matt. xxvi: 54; Luke xxii: 22; Acts iv: 28; Prov. xvi: 33; Matt. x: 29, 30. Here we see that things most minute, most contingent in our view of them, and most voluntary, are yet efficaciously produced by God.

The Arminians have too much reverence for God's perfections to limit His knowledge as to the actions of free agents. But they endeavor to evade the inevitable conclusion of the decree, and to save their favorite doctrine of conditional purposes, by limiting His concern with the acts, and especially sins, of free agents, to a mere foreknowledge, permission, and intention to make the permitted act a condition of some part of the decree. I urge that they who concede so much, cannot consistently stop there. If the sinful act (to make the least possible concession to the Calvinist,) of the free agent has been from eternity certainly foreseen by God, then its occurrence must be certain. But in this universe, nothing comes without a cause; there must therefore be some ground for the certainty of its occurrence. And it is upon that ground that God's foreknowledge of it rests. Do you ask what that ground is? I reply by asking: How does God's knowledge of the possible pass into His knowledge of the actual? Only by His determining to secure the occurrence of all the latter. Conceive of God as just now about to create a free agent, according to His plan, and launch him out on his path of freedom. If God foreknows all that the free agent will choose to do, if created; does He not purpose the doing of all this, when He creates him? To deny this is a contradiction. We may not be able to see fully how God certainly procures the doing of such acts

by free agents, still leaving them to act purely from their own spontaneity; but we cannot deny that He does, without overthrowing His sovereignty and foreknowledge. Such events may be wholly contingent to man; but to God none of them can be contingent; else all the parts of His decree, connected as effects with them as causes, would be in the same degree contingent. For instance: if Christ be not "taken, and by wicked hands crucified and slain," then, unless God is to proceed by rupturing the natural ties of cause and effect, all the natural and historical consequences of Christ's sacrifice must also fail, down to the end of time and through eternity. If God is to be able to prevent all that failure, we must ascribe to Him power to make sure by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge that the wicked hands shall not fail to take and slay the victim. The same argument may be extended to every sinful act, from which the adorable wisdom of God has evolved good consequences. When we remind ourselves how moral causes interlace and spread as time flows on, we see that, unless the decree extends to sinful acts, making them also certain, God will be robbed, by our day, of nearly all His providential power over free agents, and His foreknowledge of their doings. As this branch of the decree is most impugned (by Arminians and Cumberland Presbyterians) let it be fortified by these additional Scriptures. 1. They assert that God's purpose is concerned in such sins as those of Eli's sons. 1 Sam. ii: 25, of Shimei, 2 Sam. xvi: 10, 11, of Ahithophel, 2 Sam. xvii: 14, of the Chaldeans, 2 Kings, xxvi: 2, 3, 20, of Jeroboam, 1 Kings, xii: 15, 24, of Amaziah, 2 Chron. xxv: 20, of Nebuchadnezzar, Jer. xxv: 9: li: 20, of Pilate and Herod, Acts iii: 17, 18. 2d. The Scriptures say that God, in some way, moves men to actions, such as Hadad, the Edomite, and Rezon, the son of Eliada, against Solomon, 1 Kings xi: 14, 23. David to number Israel, 2 Sam. xxiv: 1. Pul and Tiglath-pileser, 1 Chron. v: 26. The Medes against them, Isaiah xiii: 17. The Egyptians, Ps. cv: 25. The secular Popish princes, Rev. xvii: 17. 3d. The Bible represents God as being concerned, by His purpose and providence, in men's self-deceptions. Job xii: 16; Ezek. xiv: 9; 2 Thess. ii: 11, 12. 4th. God is described as "hardening" sinners' hearts, in order to effectuate some righteous purpose. Isaiah vi: 9, 10; xxix: 10; Rom. xi: 7, 8; Exod. iv: 21, *et passim*. Rom. 9: 18. How can all those declarations be explained away? We do not, of course, advance them as shewing God to be the author of sin, but they can mean no less than that His purpose determines, and His providence superintends the occurrence of sins, for His own holy ends.

We are now prepared to approach the proposition, that God's act in forming His decree is unconditioned on anything to be done by His creatures. In another sense, a multitude of

5. The decree not conditional.

the things decreed are conditional; God's whole plan is a wise unit, linking means with ends, and causes with effects. In regard to each of these effects, the occurrence of it is conditional on the presence of its cause, and is made so dependent by God's decree itself. But while the events decreed are conditional, God's act in forming the decree is not conditional, on anything which is to occur in time; because in the case of each dependent event, His decree as much determined the occurrence of the cause, as of its effect. And this is true equally of those events in His plan dependent on the free acts of free agents. No better illustration can be given, of the mode in which God decrees dependent or conditioned events, absolutely, by equally decreeing the conditions through which they are to be brought about, than Acts xxvii: 22 with 31. The Arminian admits that all such intermediate acts of men were eternally foreseen of God, and thus embraced in His plan as conditions: but not foreordained. We reply: if they were certainly foreseen, their occurrence was certain; if this was certain, then there must have been something to determine that certainty; and that something was either God's wise foreordination, or a blind physical fate. Let the Arminian choose.

Here enters the theory of *scientia media* in God; and here we detect one of the objects for which it is invented. The student is referred to the demonstration (on p. 157-9,) of its falsehood. Were the free acts of moral agents contingent to God, the conclusion of the Socinian would be true, that they are not certainly cognizable, even to an infinite mind. Arminians, who recoil from this irreverent position, refer us to the infinitude of God's mind to account for His having certain prescience of all these contingent acts, inconceivable as it is to us. But I reply: it is worse than inconceivable, absolutely contradictory. What does the Arminian propose as the medium, or middle premise, of this inferential knowledge in God? His insight into the dispositions of all creatures enables Him, they suppose, to infer how they will act in the presence of the conditions which His omniscience foresees, will surround them at any given time. But it is obvious, this supposes such an efficient and causative connection between disposition and volition, as the Calvinist asserts, and the Arminian denies. So that, if volitions are contingent, the middle term is annihilated. We ask then, does mental perfection prompt a rational being to draw a certain inference after the sole and essential premise thereof is gone? Does infinitude help any mind to this baseless logic? Is this a compliment, or an insult to the divine intelligence? To every plain mind it is clear, that whether an intellect be greater or smaller, it would be its imperfection and not its glory, to infer without a ground of inference.

Hence, it follows, that the eternity of the decree, already

proved, offers us a demonstration against a conditional decree in God. For, *scientia media* of a contingent act of the creature being impossible, whenever an event decreed was conditioned on such contingent, creature act, as second cause, it might have been, that God would be obliged to wait until the creature acted, before He could form a positive purpose as to the event. Therefore we must hold, this creature act never was contingent to God, since His purpose about it was eternal; and the effect was foreordained in foreordaining the condition of its production.

The immutability of God's decree argues the same, and in the same way. If the condition on which His results hung were truly contingent, then it might turn out in one or another of several different ways. Hence it would always be possible that God might have to change His plans.

It is equally plain that His sovereignty would no longer be entire: but God would be dependent on His creatures for ability to effectuate many of His plans; and some might fail in spite of all He could do. I have already indicated that God's foreknowledge of the conditions, and of all dependent on them, could not possibly be certain. For if a thing is not certain to occur, a certain expectation that it will occur, is an erroneous one. Hence, the Arminian should be driven by consistency to the conclusion of the Socinian, limiting God's knowledge.

But Arminians are exceedingly fond of saying, that the dream of absolute decrees is a metaphysical invention not sustained by Scripture, and only demanded by consistency with other unhallowed, human speculation. Hence I shall take pains, as on other points, to show that it is expressly the doctrine of Scripture. Here may be cited all the proofs by which I showed that the decree is universal and efficacious. For the very conception of the matter which I have inculcated is, that events are conditioned on events, but that the decree is not; because it embraces the conditions as efficaciously as the results. See also Is. xlvi: 10, 11; Rom. ix: 11; Matt. xi: 25, 26; Eph. i: 5 and 11; Is. xl: 13; Rom. ix: 15-18; Acts ii: 23; iii: 18; Gen. i: 20.

His decree includes means and conditions. 2 Thess. ii: 13; 1 Pet. i: 2; Phil. ii: 13; Eph. ii: 8; 2 Tim. ii: 25.

But against this view objections are urged with great clamour and confidence. They may be summed up into two: that absolute decrees make God the author of sin; and that the Scriptures contradict our view by displaying many conditional threats and promises of God, e. g., Ezek, xviii: 21; Ps. lxxxi: 13, 14; &c., &c., and some cases in which decrees were actually revoked and changed in consequence of men's conduct, as 1 Sam. xiii: 13; Luke vii: 30.

That God is not, and cannot be the author of sin, is plain

from express Scripture, Jas. i: 13, 7; 1 Jno. i: 5; Eccl. vii: 29; Ps. xcii: 15; from God's law, which prohibits all sin; from the holiness of His nature, which is incapable of it; and from the nature of sin itself, which must be man's own free activity, or else is not responsible and guilty. But I remark, 1st, that so far as the great mystery of God's permission of sin enters into this objection, our minds are incapable of a complete explanation. But this incapacity is precisely the same, whatever scheme we adopt for accounting for it, unless we deny to God complete foreknowledge and power. 2. The simple fact that God clearly foresaw every sin the creature would commit, and yet created him, is attended with all the difficulty which attaches to our view. But that foresight the Arminian admits. By determining to create the creature, foreknowing that he would sin, God obviously determined the occurrence of the sin, through the creature's free agency; for at least He could have refrained from creating him. But this is just as strong as our view of the case involves. The Arminian pleads: Yea, but God determined to create a creature who, He foresaw, would sin, not for the sake of sin, but for the sake of the good and holy ends connected therewith. I reply, 3d. Well, the very same plea avails for us. We can say just as consistently: God purposed to produce these free agents, to sustain their free agency untrammelled, to surround them with outward circumstances of a given kind, to permit that free agency, moved by those circumstances as occasional causes, to exert itself in a multitude of acts, some sinful, not for the sake of the sin, but for the sake of some good and holy results which His infinite wisdom has seen best to connect therewith. Last, in the sinful act, the agency and choice is the sinner's alone; because the inscrutable modes God has for effectuating the certain occurrence of His volitions never cramp or control the creature's spontaneity: as consciousness testifies.

The second class of objections Arminians also advance with great confidence; saying that unless we are willing to charge God with insincerity, His conditional promise or threat must be received by us as an exact disclosure of His real purpose. Let us test this in any case, such as our adversaries usually select: e. g., Is. i: 19; "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." Did not God know, at the time He uttered these words, that they would not be willing and obedient? See ch. vi: 10-12. Was it not His fixed intention, at that very moment to deprive them of the good of the land, in consequence of their clearly foreseen disobedience? Here then is the very same ground for the pretended charge of insincerity in God. The truth is, that God's preceptive threats and promises are not a disclosure of His secret purpose. But the distinction between His secret and revealed will is one which is

Objected that God's threats and promises are conditional.

inevitably made by every thinking mind, and is absolutely unavoidable, unless man's mind can become as capacious as God's. And see Deut. xxix: 29. Nor does this impugn God's sincerity. The sophism of the Arminian is just that, in this case, already pointed out; confounding conditionality of events decreed, with conditionality of God's decree. God purposed, in this case, that the event, Israel's punishment, should be conditioned on the other event, their disobedience. So that his conditional promise was perfectly truthful. But He also purposed, secretly, to withhold that undeserved constraining grace, which might have prevented Israel's disobedience, so that the condition, and the thing conditioned on it should both come to pass. Again, the idea that God has revocable decrees, is as utterly incompatible with the foreknowledge of man's free acts, as with their foreordination. When it is said that the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God concerning themselves, the word counsel means but precept, cf. Ps. cvii: 11; Prov. i: 25, 30; Rev. iii: 18.

6. The freedom of God's decree follows from what has been already argued. If it was eternal, then, when it was formed, there was no Being outside of Himself to constrain or be the motive of it. If absolute, then God was induced to it by no act of other agents, but only by His own perfections. And this leads us to remark, that when we say the decree is free, we do not mean God acts in forming it, in disregard of His own perfections, but under the guidance of His own perfections alone. Eph. i: 5. Rom. xi: 34.

7. The wisdom of God's decree is manifest from the wisdom of that part of His plan which has been unfolded. Although much there is inscrutable to us, we see enough to convince us that all is wise. Rom. xi: 33, 34.

Of the general objections against the decree of God, to which I called your attention, two remain to be noticed. One is, that if it were true, it would supersede the use of all means. "If what is to be will be, why trouble ourselves with the useless and vain attempt either to procure or prevent it?"

This popular objection is exceedingly shallow. The answer is, that the use of the means, where free agents are concerned, is just as much included in the decree, as the result. God's purpose to institute and sustain the laws of causation in nature, is the very thing which gives efficacy to means, instead of taking it away. Further, both Scripture and consciousness tell us, that in using man's acts as means, God's infinite skill does it always without marring his freedom in the least.

But it is objected, second, that if there were an absolute decree, man could not be free; and so, could not be responsible. But consciousness and God's word assure us we are free. I reply,

4. Does the decree supersede means?
Is it inconsistent with free agency?

the facts cannot be incompatible because Scripture most undoubtedly asserts both, and both together. See Is. x: 5 to 15; Acts ii: 23. Second, feeble man procures free acts from his fellow-man, by availing himself of the power of circumstances as inducements to his known dispositions, and yet he regards the agent as free and responsible, and the agent so regards himself. If man can do this sometimes, why may not an infinite God do it all the time? Third, If there is anything about absolute decrees to impinge upon man's freedom of choice, it must be in their mode of execution, for God's merely having such a purpose in His secret breast could affect man in no way. But Scripture and consciousness assure us that God executes this purpose as to man's acts, not against, but through and with man's own free will. In producing spiritually good acts, He "worketh in man to will and to do;" and determines that he "shall be willing in the day of His power." And in bringing about bad acts, He simply leaves the sinner in circumstances such that he does, of himself only, yet certainly, choose the wrong. Last: This objection implies that man's acts of choice could not be free, unless contingent and uncaused. But we have seen that this theory of the will is false, foolish, and especially destructive to rational liberty.
