

LECTURE V.

DIVINE ATTRIBUTES.—Continued.

SYLLABUS.

1. Can Reason infer God's Omnipotence? How? Turretin, Loc. iii, Qu. 21. Dr. S. Clarke, Prop. 10th. Dick, Lect. 23. Charnock, Discourse x.
2. His Omniscience? How? Turretin, Qu. 12. Dr. S. Clarke, Prop. 8 and 11. Dick, Lect. 21, 22. Charnock, Discourse 8, § 2.
3. His Righteousness? How? Turretin, Qu. 19. Dr. S. Clarke, Prop. 12th. Dick, Lect. 25. Chalmers' Nat. Theology, bk iii, ch. 2. Hodge's Theology, pt. i, ch. 5, § 12.
4. His Goodness? How? Turretin, Qu. 20. Dr. S. Clarke, as above. Leibnitz, Theodicee Abregee. Chalmers' Nat. Theology, bk. iv, ch. 2. Hodge, pt. i, ch. v, § 13. Charnock, Discourse 12.
5. Does Reason show that man bears Moral Relations to God? What are they? And what the Natural Duties deduced? Butler's Analogy, pt. i, ch. 2 to 5. Howe's Living Temple, pt. i, ch. 6th. Dr. S. Clarke's Discourse. Vol. ii, Prop. 1 to 4. Turretin, qu. 22.

WHEN we enquire after God's power we mean here, not his *potestas*, or ἐξουσία, authority, but His *potentia* or δύναμις. When we say: He can do all things, we do not mean that He can suffer, or be changed, or be hurt; for the passive capacity of these things is not power, but weakness or defect. We ascribe to God no passive power. When we say that God's power is omnipotence, we mean that its object is only the possible, not the absolutely impossible. Here, however, we must again define, that by the absolutely impossible, we do not mean the physically impossible. For we see God do many things above nature, [φύσιν;] that is above what material, or human, or angelic nature can effect. But we mean the doing of that which implies an inevitable contradiction. Some, e. g. Lutherans of the older school, say it is a derogation from God's omnipotence, to limit it by the inevitable self-contradiction: [that He is able to confer actual ubiquity on Christ's material body.] But we object: Popularly, God's omnipotence may be defined as His ability to do all things. Now of two incompatibles, both cannot become entities together; for, by the terms of the case, the entity of the one destroys that of the other. But if they are not, and cannot be both things, the power of doing all things does not embrace the doing of incompatibles. But 2nd., more conclusively; if even omnipotence could effect both of two contradictories, then the self-contradictory would become the true; which is impossible for man to believe. Hence, 3d., the assertion would infringe the foundation principle of all truth; that a thing cannot be thus, and not thus, in the same sense, and at the same time.

We may add, 4th, that power is that which produces an effect; and every effect is a change. Hence the absolutely changeless is not subject to power; be that power finite or infinite. Here is an application of my remark, which no reflec-

ting person will dispute: The event which has actually happened at some past time, is, as such, irrevocable. Even omnipotence has no relevancy towards recalling it. So, when a given effect is in place, the contradictory effect is as absolutely precluded from the same time and place. There is no room for change; and therefore, no room for power.

But between these limits, we believe God is omnipotent: That is, His power is absolute as to all being. In proof, note: He obviously has great power; He has enough to produce all the effects in the universe. Cause implies power: He is the universal first Cause. 2d. His power is at least equal to the aggregate of all the forces in the universe, of every kind; because all sprang from Him at first. A mechanic constructs a machine far stronger than himself; it is because he borrows the forces of nature. There was no source whence God could borrow. He must needs produce all those forces of nature Himself; and He sustains them. 3d. God is one, and all the rest is produced by Him; so, since all the forces that exist, except His own, depend on Him, they cannot limit His force. Hence, it is absolutely unlimited, save by its own nature. And now, the exhibition of it already made in creation is so vast and varied, embracing (probably) the very existence of matter, and certainly its whole organization, the very existence of finite spirits, and all their attributes, and the government of the whole, that this power is practically to us immense. 4th. We have found God immutable. Whatever He once did, He can do again. He is as able to go on making universes such as this indefinitely, as to make this. 5th. He does not exist by succession; and hence He is able to make two or more at once, as well as successively. It is hard to conceive how power can be more infinite than this.

Once more, God's power must be conceived of as primarily immediate; i. e. His simple volition is its effectuation; and no means interpose between the will and the effect. Our wills operate on the whole external world through our members; and they, often, through implements, still more external. But God has no members; so that we must conceive of His will as producing its effects on the objects thereof as immediately as our wills do on our bodily members. Moreover the first exertion of God's power must have been immediate; for at first nothing existed to be means. God's immutability assures us that the power of so acting is not lost to Him. The attribution of such immediate power to God does not deny that He also acts through "second causes."

None who believe in God have ever denied to Him knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom is the employment of things known, with judicious reference to proper ends. Now God is Spirit: but to

God's Power Immediate.

2. Wisdom Distinguished from Knowledge.

think, to know, to choose are the very powers of spirits. The universe is full of beautiful contrivances. These exhibit knowledge, wisdom, and choice, coextensive with the aggregate of the whole.

But I had best pause and explain the usual distinctions made in God's knowledge. His *scientia visionis*, or *libera*, is His knowledge of whatever has existence before His view; that is, of all that is, has been, or is decreed to be. His *scientia intelligentiae*, or *simplex* (uncompounded with any volition) is His infinite conception of all the possible, which He does not purpose to effectuate. Others add a *scientia media*, which they suppose to be His knowledge of contingent effects including chiefly the future free and responsible acts of free agents. They call it mediate, because they suppose God foreknows these acts only inferentially, by means of His knowledge of their characters and circumstances. But Calvinists regard all this as God's *scientia visionis*. Let us see whether, in all these directions, God's knowledge is not without limit.

First, I begin from the simple fact that He is spiritual and *omnipotent* First Cause. All being save His own is the offspring of His will. Grant a God, and the doctrine of a providence is almost self-evident to the reason. This refers not only phenomena of specific creation, but all phenomena, to God's will. If any thing or event has actuality, it is because He has willed it. But now, can volition be conceived, in a rational spirit, except as conditioned on cognition *a priori* to itself? Hence, 1st, a knowledge is implied in God, *a priori* to and coextensive with His whole purpose. But because this purpose (that of universal almighty First Cause) includes the whole that has been, is, and shall be; and since volition does not obscure, but fix the cognition which is the object thereof, God has a *scientia visionis*, embracing all the actual. 2nd. Will implies selection: there must be more in the *a priori* cognition than is in the volition. Hence God's *scientia simplex* or knowledge of the possible, is wider than his *scientia visionis*. This view will be found to have settled the question between us and Arminians, whether God purposes the acts of free agents because He has foreseen their certain futurity, or whether their futurity is certain because He has purposed them. Look and see.

But more popularly; all God's works reveal marks of His knowledge, thought and wisdom. But these works are so vast, so varied, so full of contrivance, they disclose to us a knowledge practically boundless. His infinite power implies omniscience, for "knowledge is power." Certain success implies full knowledge of means and effects. We saw God is omnipresent; but He is spirit. Hence He knows all that is present to Him; for it is the

God's Knowledge of two Kinds.

Proved from God's Will.

Knowledge and wisdom seen in His works.

nature of spirit to know. A parallel argument arises from God's providence; (which reason unavoidably infers.) The ends which are subserved show as much knowledge and wisdom as the structure of the beings used—so that we see evidence of complete knowledge of all second causes, including reasonable agents and their acts. For so intimate is the connection of cause with cause, that perfect knowledge of the whole alone can certify results from any. Here also we learn, God's knowledge of past and future is as perfect as of present things; for the completion of far-reaching plans, surely evolved from their remote causes, implies the retention by God of all the past, and the clear anticipation of all the future. Nay, what ground of certain futurity is there, save that God purposes it? His omnipotence here shows that He has a complete foreknowledge; because that which is to be is no other than what He purposes. God's immutability proves also His perfect knowledge of past, present, and future. Did He discover new things, these might become bases for new purposes, or occasions of new volitions, and God would no longer be the same in will. God's omniscience is implied also in all His moral attributes; for if He does not perform His acts understandingly, He is not praiseworthy in them. Last, our consciences reveal an intuition of God's infinite knowledge; for our fears recognize Him as seeing our most secret, as well as our public acts. His unfading knowledge of the past is especially pointed out by conscience; for whenever she remembers, she takes it for granted that God does. Thus we find God's *scientia visionis* is a perfect knowledge, past, present, and future, of all beings and all their actions, including those of moral agents.

How do we infer His knowledge of the possible? A reasonable being must first conceive, in order to produce. He cannot make, save as He first has his own idea, to make by. God then, before He began to make the universe, must have had in His mind a conception, in all its details, of whatever He was to effectuate. Let me, in passing, call your attention to a difference between the human and the divine imagination, which is suggested here. You are all familiar with the assertion of the psychologists, that our imaginations cannot create elements of conception, but only new combinations. The original elements, which this faculty reconstructs into new images, must first be given to the mind from without, through sense-perception. Thus, in human conception, the thing must be before the thought; but in God's, the thought must have been before the thing, for the obvious reason, that the thing could only come into existence by virtue of God's conception *a priori* to any objective perception. It is thus demonstrable, that the divine mind has this power, which is impossible to the human imagination. Such is the difference between the independent, infinite, and the depen-

2. *Scientia Simplex*
Inferred.

dent, finite spirit. But even in this contrast, we see that the imagination is one of man's noblest faculties, and most god-like. But, to return: All that is now in *esse*, must have been thought by God, while only in *posse*, and before it existed. How long before? As God changes not, it must have been from eternity. There then was a knowledge of the possible. But was that which is now actual, the only possible before God's thought? Sovereignty implies selection; and this, two or more things to chose among. And unless God had before Him the ideas of all possible universes, He may not have chosen the one which, had He known more, would have pleased Him best; His power was limited. In conclusion, the infallibility of all God's knowledge is implied in His power. Ordinarily, he chooses to work only through regular second causes. But causes and effects are so linked that any uncertainty in one jeopardizes all the subsequent. But we see that God is possessed of some way of effectuating all His will. Therefore He infallibly knows all causes; but each effect is in turn a cause.

We must also believe that God knows all things intuitively and not deductively. A deduction is a discovery. To discover something implies previous imperfection of knowledge. God's knowledge, moreover, is not successive as ours is, but simultaneous. Inference implies succession; for conclusion comes after premise.

God's righteousness, as discoverable by reason, means, generally, His rectitude, and not His distributive justice. Is He a moral being? Is His will regulated by right? Reason answers, yes; by justice, by faithfulness, by goodness, by holiness.

3. Rectitude.

First, because this character is manifest in the order of nature which He has established. This argument cannot be better stated than in the method of Bishop Butler. 1. God is Governor over man; as appears from the fact that in a multitude of cases, He rewards our conduct with pleasures and pains. For the order of Nature, whether maintained by God's present providence, or impressed on it at first only, is God's doing; its rewards are His rewarding. 2. The character of proper rewards, and especially punishments, appears clearly in these traits. They follow acts, though pleasant in the doing. They sometimes tarry long, and at last fall violently. After men have gone certain lengths, repentance and reform are vain, &c. 3. The reward and penalties of society go to confirm the conclusion, because they are of God's ordaining. Second; This God's rule is moral; because the conduct which earns well-being is virtuous; and ill-being, sinful. True remedial processes, such as repentance, reform, have their peculiar pains; but these are chargeable rather to the sin, than the remedy. True again; the

God's Knowledge all Primitive.

Rectitude of God proven by Bishop Butler.

wicked sometimes prosper; but natural reason cannot but regard this as an exception, which future awards will right. Further: Society (which is God's ordinance,) usually rewards virtue and punishes vice. Love of approbation is instinctive; but God thus teaches men most generally to approve the right. And last: How clear the course of Nature makes God's approval of the right appear, is seen in this; that all virtuous societies tend to self-perpetuation in the long run, and all vicious ones to self-extinction. Third: Life is full of instances of probation, as seed-time for harvest, youth for old age, which indicates that man is placed under a moral probation here.

But a most powerful argument for God's rectitude is that presented by the existence of conscience in man. Its teachings are universal. Do some deny its intuitive authority, asserting it to be only a result of habit or policy? It is found to be a universal result; and this proves that God has laid in us some intentional foundation for the result. Now, whatever, the differences of moral opinion, the peculiar trait of conscience is that it always enjoins that which seems to the person right. It may be disregarded; but the man must think, if he thinks at all, that in doing so, he has done wrong. The act it condemns may give pleasure; but the wickedness of the act, if felt at all, can only give pain. Conscience is the imperative faculty. Now if God had not conceived the moral distinction, He could not have imprinted it on us. But is His will governed by it? Does he not, from eternity, know extension as an object of thought, an attribute of matter; and sin, as a quality of the rebel creature? Yet He Himself is neither extended, nor evil. The reply is: since God has, from eternity, had the idea of moral distinction, whence was it is derived, save from His own perfection? In what being illustrated, if not in Himself? But more, conscience is God's imperative in the human soul. This is its peculiarity among rational judgments. But since God implanted conscience, its imperative is the direct expression of His will, that man shall act righteously. But when we say, that every known expression of a being's will is for the right, this is virtually to say that he wills always righteously. The King's character is disclosed in the character of his edicts.

God's truth and faithfulness are evinced by the same arguments; and by these, in addition. The structure of our senses and intelligence, and the adaptation of external nature thereto, are His handiwork. Now, when our senses and understanding are legitimately used, their informations are always found, so far as we have opportunity to test them, correspondent to reality. One sense affirms the correctness of another. Senses confirm reasonings, and *vice versa*. Last, unless we can locate truth in God, there is no truth anywhere. For our laws of perception and thought being His imprint, if His truth cannot be

relied on, their truth cannot, and universal skepticism is the result.

“The world is full of the goodness of the Lord.” I only aim to classify the evidences that God is benevolent. And 1st, generally: since God is the original Cause of all things, all the happiness amidst His works is of His doing; and therefore proves His benevolence. But more definitely; the natures of all orders of sentient beings, if not violated, are constructed, in the main, to secure their appropriate well-being. Instance the insect, the fish, the bird, the ox, the man. 3d. Many things occur in the special providence of God which show Him benevolent; such as providing remedial medicines, &c., for pain, and special interpositions in danger. 4th. God might, compatibly with justice, have satisfied Himself with so adapting external nature to man's senses and mind as to make it minister to his being and intelligence, and thus secure the true end of his existence, without, in so doing, making it pleasant to his senses. Our food and drink might have nourished us, our senses of sight and hearing might have informed us, without making food sweet, light beautiful, and sounds melodious to us. And yet appetite might have impelled us to use our senses and take our food. Such, in a word, is God's goodness, that He turns aside to strew incidental enjoyment. The more unessential these are to His main end, the stronger the argument. 5th. God has made all the beneficent emotions, love sympathy, benevolence, forgiveness, delightful in their exercise; and all the malevolent ones, as resentment, envy, revenge, painful to their subjects; thus teaching us that He would have us propagate happiness and diminish pain. Last: Conscience, which is God's imperative, enjoins benevolence on us as one duty, whenever compatible with others. Benevolence is therefore God's will; and doubtless, He who wills us to be so, is benevolent Himself.

No Pagan theist ever has doubted God's providence. You may refer me to the noted case of the Epicureans; they were practical atheists. Their notion that it was derogatory to the blessedness and majesty of the gods to be wearied with terrestrial affairs, betrays in one word a false conception of the divine perfections. Fatigue, confusion, worry, are the result of weakness and limitation. To infinite knowledge and power the fullest activities are infinitely easy, and so, pleasurable. Common sense argues from the perfection of God, that He does uphold and direct all things by His Providence. His wisdom and power enable Him to it. His goodness and justice certainly impel Him to it; for it would be neither benevolent nor just, having brought sentient beings into existence, to neglect their welfare, rights and guilt. God's wisdom will certainly prosecute those suitable ends for which He made the universe, by superintending it. To have made it without an object; or, having one, to overlook that object wholly after the world was already made,

would neither of them argue a wise being. The manifest dependence of the creature confirms the argument.

But there stands out the great fact of the existence of much suffering in the universe of God; and reason asks: "If God is almighty, all-wise, sovereign, why, if benevolent, did He admit any suffering in His world? Has He not chosen it because He is pleased with it *per se*?" It is no answer to say: God makes the suffering the means of good, and so chooses it, not for its own sake, but for its results. If He is omnipotent and all-wise, He could have produced the same *quantum* of good by other means, leaving out the suffering. Is it replied: No, that the virtues of sympathy, forgiveness, patience, submission, could have had no existence unless suffering existed? I reply that then their absence would have been no blemish or lack in the creature's character. It is only because there is suffering, that sympathy therewith is valuable. Suppose it be said again: "All physical evil is the just penalty of moral evil," and so necessitated by God's justice? The great difficulty is only pushed one step farther back. For, while it is true, sin being admitted, punishment ought to follow, the question returns: Why did the Almighty permit sin, unless He be defective in holiness as in benevolence? It is no *theodicee* to say that God cannot always exclude sin, without infringing free-agency; for I prove, despite all Pelagians, from Celestius downwards, that God can do it, by His pledge to render elect angels and men indefectible for ever. Does God then choose sin? This is the mighty question, where a *theodicee* has been so often attempted in vain. The most plausible theory is that of the *optimist*; that God saw this actual universe, though involving evil, is on the whole the most beneficent universe, which was possible in the nature of things. For they argue, in support of that proposition: God being infinitely good and wise, cannot will to bring out of *posse* into *esse*, a universe which is on the whole, less beneficent than any possible universe. The obvious objections to this *Beltistic* scheme are two. It assumes without warrant, that the greatest natural good of creation is God's highest end in creating and governing the universe. We shall see, later in this course, how this assumption discloses itself as a grave error; and in the hands of the followers of Leibnitz and the optimists, vitiates their whole theory of morals and their doctrine of atonement. The other objection is, that it limits the power of God. Being infinite, He could have made a universe including a *quantum* of happiness equal to that in our universe, and exclusive of our evils.

But there is a more legitimate and defensible hypothesis. It is not competent to us to say that the beneficence of result is, or ought to be, God's chief ultimate end in creation and providence. It is one of His worthy ends; this is all we should as-

Existence of Evil.
How explained.

Optimist Theory Modified.

sert. But may we not assume that doubtless there is a set of ends, (no man may presume to say what all the parts of that collective end are,) which God eternally sees to be the properest ends of His creation and providence? I think we safely may. Doubtless those ends are just such as they ought to be, with reference to all God's perfections; and the proper inference from those perfections is, that He is producing just such a universe, in its structure and management, as will, on the whole, most perfectly subserve that set of ends. In this sense, and no other, I am an optimist. But now, let us make this all-important remark: When the question is raised, whether a God of infinite power can be benevolent in permitting natural, and holy in permitting moral evil, in His universe, the burden of proving the negative rests on the doubter. We who hold the affirmative are entitled to the presumption, because the contrivances of creation and providence are beneficent so far as we comprehend them. Even the physical and moral evils in the universe are obviously so overruled, as to bring good out of evil. (Here is the proper value in the argument, of the instances urged by the optimist: that suffering makes occasion for fortitude and sympathy, &c., &c.; and that even man's apostacy made way for the glories of Redemption.) The conclusion from all these beautiful instances is, that so far as finite minds can follow them, even the evils tend towards the good. Hence, the presumptive probability is in favor of a solution of the mystery, consistent with the infinite perfections of God. To sustain that presumption against the impugner, we have only to make the hypothesis, that for reasons we cannot see, God saw it was not possible to separate the existing evils from that system which, as a whole, satisfied His own properest ends. Now let the skeptic disprove that hypothesis! To do so, he must have omniscience. Do you say, I cannot demonstrate it? Very true; for neither am I omniscient. But I have proved that the reasonable presumption is in favor of the hypothesis; that it may be true, although we cannot explain how it comes to be true.

If the existence and moral perfections of God be admitted, no one will dispute that man bears moral relations to Him. This appears very simply from the fact that man is a moral being related to God as his Maker and providential Ruler. It is also inferrible from the marks of a probation, and a moral rule appearing in the course of nature. And it is emphatically pronounced by the native supremacy of conscience, commanding us to obey. Rational Deists as well as Natural Theologians have attempted to deduce the duties man owes his Creator. They are usually (on grounds sufficiently obvious) summed up as: 1. Love, with reverence and gratitude; 2. Obedience; 3. Penitence; 4. Worship. The rule of obedience, is, of course, in natural religion, the law of nature in the conscience.

5. Man's Duties to God.