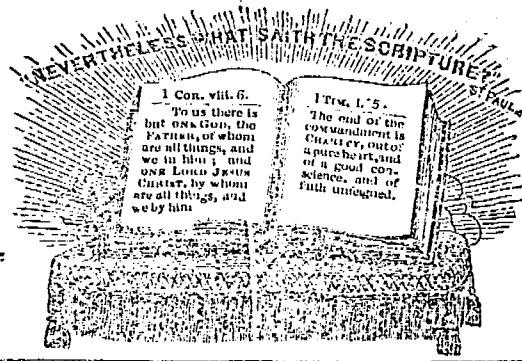


THE BIBLE



CHRISTIAN.

Truth, Holiness,

Liberty, Love.

VOL. II.

MONTREAL, AUGUST, 1845.

No. 8.

UNIVERSALITY OF THE DIVINE BENEVOLENCE.

For the same reason that the Deity designed to make one human being happy, he must have purposed to bestow felicity ultimately upon all. For, if there be a single individual whom he created without this design, since he must still have had some design, it must be different from that which we have already shown to be the only one which he could have had in view.

In reality, his purpose with respect to every individual must have been either to make him happy or miserable. If it were not to make him happy, it must have been to make him miserable; but to suppose that he purposed to make any one miserable ultimately and upon the whole, is to suppose that he purposed the production of misery for its own sake, which has already been shown to be impossible.

And if every principle of the human understanding revolt at the conclusion, that he is partial and capricious in his kindness, and has designed to make some individuals happy and others miserable, it is equally opposed by all the appearances in nature. It is refuted by every object to which we can direct our attention. The sun, in the brightness of his glory, diffuses light and joy through all the nations of the earth. He has no favorite to bless. He regards not in his course the little distinctions which prevail among mankind. He shines not on the lands of the great, forgetting to pour his beams on the lowly spot of the peasant. He lights up the Indies with a burning glow—he smiles upon the nations of Europe with a milder beam, and he shines upon the hoary path of the Laplander, amidst his mountains of eternal snow. 'The Lord is good to all. He causes his sun to shine upon the evil and the good.'

The cloud, bearing in its bosom riches and fertility, pours its blessings upon every field, without regarding the name or rank of its owner. 'The Lord visiteth the earth with his goodness; he watereth it with the dew of heaven; he maketh it soft with showers; he blesseth the springing thereof.'

No where in nature are there traces of a partial God. Some inequalities indeed appear in the distribution of his bounty, but this must necessarily be the case, if creatures are formed with different capacities, and endowed with different degrees of excellence. There can be no degrees in excellence—there can be no variety of orders and ranks among intelligent beings, unless some are made higher and some lower, some better and some worse than others. But how low in capacity, how dark and grovelling in apprehension, how little capable of estimating the benignity of the Author of its mercies, must be that mind which dreams that the Deity is partial, because by diffusing every where a countless variety of capacity, excellence, and happiness, he has adopted the means of producing the greatest sum of enjoyment!

The great things which make us what we are, which minister to the primary wants, and which lie at the foundation of the happiness of all animal and intelligent natures, are always and every where the same. Life itself is the same, wherever that wonderful power, which imparts to a mass of clay the amazing properties of sensation and intelligence, has operated. Wherever a vital fluid circulates, from the lowest animal up to the highest human being, it flows to dif-

fuse enjoyment. To all, indeed, it does not impart an equal sum of happiness, because it could not do so, unless every object in nature were exactly alike; but to all it is the source of pleasure. Simple existence is a blessing; simply to be, is happiness. And this is the case with every race of animals, and with every individual of every race. The Deity has made no distinction in the nature of the existence which he has given to his creatures. He has not made the act of existing pleasurable in one and painful in another; he has made it the same in all, and in all he has made it happy. No reason can be assigned for this, but that he is good to all.

Every appearance of partiality vanishes from all his great and substantial gifts. It is only in what is justly termed the adventitious circumstances which attend his bounties, that the least indication of it can be supposed to exist; yet narrow minds confine their attention to these adventitious circumstances, and hence conclude that he is partial in the distribution of his goodness; while all his great and fundamental blessings are so universally and equally diffused, that they demonstrate him to be a Being of perfect benevolence. Now we ought to reason from the great to the little, not from the little to the great. We ought to say, because, in every thing of primary importance there is no appearance of partiality therefore there can be really none, although in lesser things there is some inequality in the distribution of the absolute sum of enjoyment; not because there is some inequality in lesser things, therefore, there must be partiality, although there is no indication of it in any thing of real moment.

If to this consideration be added what has already been established, that even the most wretched of the human race enjoy a great preponderance of happiness, it will furnish another decisive proof, that the Deity designed to make all his creatures happy.

If we look inward on ourselves, and consider all the parts which minister to the perfection and happiness of our nature, whether animal or intellectual, we shall find a farther confirmation of this great truth. Did not one God fashion us? Has he given to any one of us more members than to another? Has he superadded to one, in the use of an organ, an exquisite degree of enjoyment, which he has denied to another? Are not all our organs the same, adapted to the same uses, and productive of the same gratifications? Has he not given to all the same number of senses, and made them the source of similar intelligence and pleasure?

Indeed, no one can imagine, that in the formation and government of the world the Deity has been influenced by partiality, without entertaining the most low and puerile conceptions of his nature and conduct. When of one piece of clay he made an animal without reason, and of another a man, he felt no more partiality towards the clay which formed the man, than towards that of which he constructed the animal without reason. But he determined to impart enjoyment to an infinite variety of organized and sensitive creatures. It was necessary to the perfection of his plan, that there should be an animal without reason; it was necessary that there should be a man. He therefore gave to each the properties it possesses.

Now, while we suppose that he was not influenced by partiality, in the dis-

tribution which he has made between the different genera of creatures, shall we imagine, that when he proceeded to form the species and still more the individuals, he on a sudden changed the principles of his conduct, and acted solely with a view to gratify a capricious fondness for one individual, and aversion to another—that classes and orders, those great lines of demarkation between different creatures, do not proceed from partiality, but that the slight shades of difference which distinguish individuals from individuals do? Can any conception be more puerile? Every blessing diffused over the creation, which is of great or permanent importance, is given, not to individuals, but to the species. This is the invariable law of nature.

But, while the universality of the divine benevolence will be readily admitted, with respect to the blessings which have been mentioned, many persons believe that the Deity acts upon a totally different principle, with regard to the distribution of moral and spiritual favor, and that he invariably confines the communication of this description of good to a few chosen individuals. The most popular systems of religion which prevail in the present age are founded upon this opinion. But if it be a fact, that there is no partiality in the primary and essential gift of existence, in life, considered as a whole, in the minor properties and felicities of our nature, in our senses, in our intellectual and moral faculties, and in the gratification of which they are respectively the source—if all these great blessings agree in this important circumstance, that they are instruments of enjoyment to all, and that the happiness they actually do impart is universal—it must follow, that there is no partiality in the distribution of moral and spiritual good. For why is this spiritual good imparted to any? Why is it superadded to the merely animal and intellectual nature of a single individual? It must be to perfect its possessor, and to make him susceptible of a greater sum of enjoyment.

We perceive, that in addition to mere animal existence, man is endowed with organs which constitute him the most perfect of the creatures which inhabit the earth. Why were these organs given him? Without doubt that he might enjoy a higher degree of happiness than the creatures beneath him. To the organs which constitute him a mere (though a very perfect) animal, there are then superadded others which impart to him a rational and moral nature, with a view that he may enjoy a more perfect happiness; but, besides all these, other properties are added, which exalt him still higher in the scale of creation—properties, for the reception of which, the former only qualify him—properties which make him capable of loving his Maker, and of enjoying him forever. Why is he endowed with these? Certainly that he may enjoy a more perfect happiness than he could attain without them. Must not this reason then induce the Author of these invaluable blessings to bestow them upon the race as well as upon a few individuals?

Let the mind dwell for a moment upon what it is it really supposes, when it imagines that these properties are given to some and denied to others. The difference between the man who is capable of perceiving the excellence of the great and perfect Being who made him, of loving him, and of conforming to his character, and the man who not

only is not endowed with this capacity, but is impelled by the principles of his nature to hate the Deity, is infinitely greater than the difference between a worm and the most exalted of the human race. For, if before the religious faculty begins to be developed, there appear no remarkable distinction between them, let them be observed after this principle has been called into action, and has operated for some time. It will then be seen, that in their conceptions, their occupations, and their enjoyments, they totally differ from each other—that they have hardly any thing in common—that there is as great a distinction between them, as between the insect which grovels in the dust, and the man who first measured the distance of the stars, and taught us the laws by which the universe is governed. Let the mind look forward to eternity, and suppose, (as always is supposed,) that both will progressively advance, each in his career, through the ages of an endless duration; how immeasurable does the distance between them then become!

Now the difference which is here supposed between two beings of the same species is never found to exist. There is nothing similar to it in the whole range of that part of the creation with which we are acquainted. Differences between individuals of the same species are observable, but there is nothing approaching the immensity of this inconceivable distinction. Whatever differences prevail are those of degree, not of kind. Every individual of the same species has every essential property the same as his fellows; but here a property infinitely more important in its consequences than the addition of a new sense would be, is given to one and denied to another. This looks not like the work of Deity. It is a vast and sudden chasm in a plan of wondrous order, for which no preparation is made, to which we are led by no preparatory steps, for which nothing can account, and which nothing can reconcile. It bears upon it traces of the imperfect and short-sighted contrivance of man; it is contradicted by all which we feel and know of the works of God, and it ought to be driven from the mind of every rational being, that the fair creation of the Deity may no longer be falsified by the deceptive medium through which it is viewed, and that our Maker may not be charged with injustice because our eye is evil.—*Dr. T. Southwood Smith.*

FREE INQUIRY.

Free inquiry, by purifying and exalting our conceptions of the character of God, disposes the mind to veneration, love, and confidence; and our homage becomes less unworthy of him when we "sing his praises with understanding." The fervour of devotion, the pleasure of obedience, must increase in proportion as we pass from the worship of an unknown or terrific God, to that of the Universal Father. The sacrifices of error and enthusiasm are not those with which he is well pleased. To the prejudiced, the superstitious, and the unthinking, Inquiry, like Paul at Athens, cries, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." As we know more of Infinite Perfection we shall obey with greater facility the command of Christ, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."