

we know not how. The choice, he calls an act of Will ; the result of the choice, a voluntary action ; thus (most unhappily, in my opinion) distinguishing an act of Will from a voluntary action. But he admits that we are not conscious of the voluntary action ; we are conscious only of the act of Will, and of an expectation, founded on experience, that the action will follow. "There is nothing," he says, "which I am conscious of while I walk, but only of my preferring or choosing, through successive moments, that there should be such alterations of my external sensations and motions, together with a concurring habitual expectation that it will be so ; having ever found by experience, that on such an immediate preference such sensations do actually, instantaneously and constantly arise." From this it is plain, that when Edwards speaks of our being at liberty to do as we will he does not mean that we are at liberty to choose one or other of two alternatives, or at liberty to do anything, in the sense of exerting any subjective energy ; but what he means is this : supposing our choice to have been made in a particular manner, if there is no hindrance in the way, to prevent our choice taking effect in those outward results which experience has taught us to connect with particular volitions, then, and in that regard, we are free. The example by which he illustrates his doctrine is : a bird let loose is at liberty to fly. Its cage being open, there is no hindrance to its flying.

I cannot but wonder at the laudations which this view of liberty has received from a host of eminent writers. In my opinion it has no merit whatever. On the contrary, by representing liberty as lying merely in the absence of hindrance to the effects of our actions, effects confessedly occurring beyond the sphere of consciousness, it tends to obscure and perplex the great truth that there is a freedom of which we are conscious. No reasonings ever have been, or ever will be, able to drive out of men's minds the conviction that they are free ; free, not in the Edwardian sense, but with a liberty which belongs to their very nature as rational beings, and with which neither the presence nor the absence of hindrances to the motions of their limbs has anything to do. A man bound in chains is a free agent, as truly as if the fetters were removed. He is not free, you say, to cast off his chains. The bird is not at liberty to fly. I answer : What