

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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ORIGINAL.

ON MORAL EVIL.

*I'ideo nunc aliam Legem, in membris repugnantem Legi-
mentis meae.—Rom. 7, 23*

I see another Law in my members, fighting against the Law of my mind.

In contemplating the endless wonders of this stupendous universe, we view every thing in it pursuing its wisely appointed course, and tending to the end for which it was made. The heavenly bodies, for instance, are seen to describe with absolute exactness the circuits traced out for them, to be performed in a given time. The sun is true to a moment in his appearance and disappearance round our globe; and wheels along with unerring precision throughout the range immense of his annual orbit. The moon too, knows her time, and her place in the firmament; and, though constantly changing, is never found straying from her place assigned. The seasons are regular in their expected succession. The flowery spring, awakening, with gentle whisper the spirit of vegetation, bids him prepare in embryo the fruits of the earth. These are consigned, in all their gay, green, growthy, vigour, to the ripening influence of summer. Autumn at length, receives matured, and pours into the lap of winter, the needful provision against the dreary, unproductive interval, ordained for nature's rest.

The elements obey the laws, designed to impel or restrain them. Animals, and all living creatures excepting one, are orderly, and guided by their several instincts, within the bounds set to their operations by the all-wise Creator. Man, alone, forms an exception to the admirable and perfect scheme, and, though he is the only rational creature here below, to whom all seems referred, yet, he is the only one observed to deviate from reason's rule, and to pursue a track directly opposite to the one traced out for him to walk in.

Hence, to whoever contemplates the general system of nature, he invariably forms the greatest puzzle and enigma of the universe. The greatest difficulty has, therefore, always been found, save in the Revealed Religion, to account for that perversity of disposition, which sets him so at variance with himself, when it solicits or impels him, to act in direct opposition to what his conscience tells him is the will and order of the Deity.

Reason, which discovers nothing but good, flowing from the source itself of goodness; nothing but perfect from absolute and essential perfection; acknowledges itself wholly at a loss to explain this anomaly in the works of God, and incapable of as-

certaining the original cause of man's propensity to evil. It indeed clearly perceives, that a fatal change has taken place in him: for the idea we have of the infinite goodness and justice of God, obliges us to suppose, the creature issuing guiltless from his creating hand, more perfect in its kind, than it is now observed to be, and happier in its condition. The same idea obliges us to ascribe all to the creature's own fault, its present imperfection and consequent wretchedness. We hence necessarily infer, that human nature has been somehow polluted, and that too, in its very source, since the evil is derived on all, like a family distemper: for who of our race, young or old, but feels its afflictive influence? It is an evil then inherited from our earliest progenitors, in whose guilt alone, it would have originated.

This much, reason clearly perceives, unassisted by Revelation; and also, that, though we are punished, we are not finally cast off, since our sufferings are still blended with numberless comforts and delights. We find ourselves still the objects of our Maker's kind regard, who seems to punish as a father, only to reclaim, and to save; not as an inexorable judge, to condemn and destroy.

Here our reason, after catching this cheering glimpse of hope, straight loses itself in its conjectures, as to the means and manner of restoring our fallen and degraded nature, to its primitive condition, which nothing could make known to us, but the Deity's revelation of his own free and merciful purpose.

Let us then attend to what has been revealed concerning man's original state; his transgression the cause of all his woe; and the means his Maker has thought proper to use, in order to cancel his guilt, and fit him for enjoying, even in an enhanced degree, the endless, pure, and perfect bliss, for which he had created him.

Man, we are informed, was created such as reason shews he must have been, innocent, and therefore perfectly happy; happy internally and externally; in his whole being, soul and body: In his soul, because his will, ever assenting to his understanding, secured that guiding faculty's entire approbation; which always afforded him the purest mental satisfaction, and never left him cause to repent or repine: in his body, as all external objects were made but for his enjoyment, and wholly calculated to bless and delight his senses.

He was created to the image of God, rational, immortal, just, happy and free; bearing in his nobler half, the soul, a furthermore particular resemblance to his Maker; who, as he has revealed him-

self to us, one in essence, and three in persons; has made the soul, one in substance, and three in powers,—the will, the memory, and the understanding.

He was constituted from the beginning, a free agent; and, though bound by every possible motive, to make the divine will the rule of his conduct, he was left at perfect liberty to obey, or not obey, as he chose; not, however, without being sufficiently warned of the evil that would accrue to him, from his disobedience. In one sole instance, was he required to give proof of that entire deference, which he, and all creatures necessarily owe to the supreme will of their maker. In the midst of all the sweets of Paradise, he was forbidden under pain of death, to eat of the fruit of a certain tree.

This restrictive mandate, was such as affected by its breach or observance, his whole being, with which he was bound to worship God; his soul and his body; his soul by the merit of her obedience, or the guilt of her disobedience:—his body, by the due mortification, or criminal indulgence of its animal appetite. This mandate, however, he ventured to transgress, & thus broke the link of love's bright chain, that bound him to his Maker; setting himself adrift from his holy and happy state, upon the wide-wafting and tempest-troubled ocean of sin and woe. Thus is accounted—for all that misery, to which our race is exposed; a misery originating in the transgression of our first parents, and entailed by them on all their posterity.

Their rash act of only eating an apple, against the command of God, may seem at first scarcely an adequate cause for all the evils thence said to be derived: but, that act considered, as it really was, a positive refusal to obey the Creator, is, in the eye of reason, no less a deviation from the order of nature, and a direct tendency to confusion and ruin, in the moral sense, than it would be in the physical. Should the seasons refuse to succeed each other in their appointed turns; or should any of the planetary orbs forsake its course assigned, and receding widely from its sphere, should meet and obstruct the others in their full career, till the mighty blending masses, with hideous crash and din, carry disorder and ruin through all the works of God, in spite of his conservative omnipotence.

It is true, the moral evil was permitted, and, as reason itself demonstrates, for reasons worthy of God; who, in calling the rational beings into existence, could have had no view of thus enhancing his own all perfect bliss; but, in the excess of his goodness, of allowing a participation in its sweets to creatures, rendered capable and worthy of such a gratuitous favour. These, therefore, he created