

upon it. Why is it so soft? Not because it is so naturally, but because of an extraneous or outside influence which has been exerted upon it. Now, what would be the result if this softening influence were withdrawn from it? Let us see. Already the smith has taken it from the fire and laid it upon the anvil; and even while we have been thinking about it, it has begun to change its colour; the white has been changed for red, and the redness is gradually changing into blackness; and it no longer yields to the hammer as it formerly did—*it has become hard*. Now what was it that hardened the iron? Was it the man who took it out of the fire, or the heat which withdrew itself from the metal, or the iron itself which gathered up the particles of which it is composed more closely together, so that the mass became denser? If the man had not taken the metal out of the fire the heat would not have withdrawn itself, and if the heat had not withdrawn itself the particles of the iron would not have drawn together so closely, and if the particles had not been so powerfully attracted to each other the mass would not have become so hard. The question is therefore susceptible of three different answers at least, all of which are equally true. The result may be attributed to the man, to the iron itself, or, strange and paradoxical as it may appear, to the heat.

Now this illustration, while it assists us in understanding the case of Pharaoh, may also help in the reconciliation of these apparently contradictory accounts of the numbering of the people. It shows how the same result may be truthfully attributed to different and widely dissimilar causes. And if so, why might not the same thing be truthfully attributed to God and to Satan at the same time? Let us see. The retributive element in this transaction must not be overlooked. It is said the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. If this had not been the case, David would not have been permitted to fall into this trap, and the people would not have been subjected to the signal punishment which followed. The people had sinned, the displeasure of the Lord was kindled against them on account of their sin, Satan was waiting for an opportunity to engage in any work of evil; and all that was necessary to hurry David into this additional act of transgression, and to bring upon him and his guilty subjects the bitter train of disastrous consequences which