

# FREETHOUGHT JOURNAL

ALL THINGS DEMONSTRATED & CERTAIN

IN WHATSOEVER MAY BE DOUBTED

IN ALL THINGS

UNIVERSITY

FREE DIVERSITY

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## "FREE WILL" AND "FREE MORAL AGENCY."

(Continued.)

BY ALLEN PRINGLE.

Since my last article on this subject in the FREETHOUGHT JOURNAL, an address on "Science and Man," given at Birmingham, England, by Prof. Tyndall, has been published in Toronto in the November number of the *Fortnightly Review*. It is with the profoundest pleasure that I peruse this address, dealing as it does incidentally with the question of "Free Will"—a question which has engaged my thoughts since the time I became capable of observation and reflection. My intense gratification will be better understood when it is seen that the main positions taken in my previous articles are sustained and confirmed by one of the greatest of living scientists and thinkers. In the course of his address Prof. Tyndall says:

"We now stand face to face with the final problem. It is this: Are the brain and the moral and intellectual processes known to be associated with the brain—and as far as our experience goes, indissolubly associated—subject to the same laws which we find paramount in physical nature? Is the will of man, in other words, free, or are it and nature equally 'bound fast in fate'? From this latter conclusion, after he had established it to the entire satisfaction of his understanding, the great German thinker, Fichte, recoiled. You will find the record of this struggle between head and heart in his book entitled, 'Die Bestimmung des Menschen'—the Vocation of Man. Fichte was determined at all hazards to maintain his freedom, but the price he

paid for it indicates the difficulty of the task. To escape from the iron necessity seen everywhere reigning in physical nature, he turned defiantly round upon nature and law, and affirmed both of them to be the products of his own mind. He was not going to be the slave of a thing which he had himself created. There is a good deal to be said in favor of this view, but few of us probably would be able to bring into play the solvent transcendentalism whereby Fichte melted his chains.

"Why do some of us regard this notion of necessity with terror, while others do not fear it at all? Has not Carlyle somewhere said that a belief in destiny is the bias of all earnest minds? 'It is not nature,' says Fichte, 'it is freedom itself, by which the greatest and most terrible disorders incident to our race are produced. Man is the cruellest enemy of man.' But the question of moral responsibility here emerges, and it is the possible loosening of this responsibility that so many of us dread. The notion of necessity certainly failed to frighten Bishop Butler. He thought it untrue, but he did not fear its practical consequences. He showed, on the contrary, in the 'Analogy' that as far as human conduct is concerned, the two theories of free will and necessity come to the same in the end.

"What is meant by free will? Does it imply the power of producing events without antecedents!—of starting, as it were, upon a creative tour of occurrences without any impulse from within or from without? Let us consider the point. If there be absolutely or relatively no reason why a tree should fall, it will not fall; and if there be absolutely or relatively no reason why a man should act, he will not act. It is true that the united voice of this assembly could not persuade me that I have not, at this moment, the power to lift my arm if I wish to do so. Within this range the conscious freedom of my will cannot be questioned. But what about the origin of the 'wish'? Are we, or are we not, complete masters of the circumstances which create our wishes, motives, and tendencies to action? Adequate reflection will, I think, prove that we are not. What, for example, have I had to do with the generation and development of that which some will consider my total being, and others a most potent factor of my total being—the living, speaking organism which now addresses