SPINNING.

Like a blind spinner in the sun,
I tread my days;
I know that all the threads will run
Appointed ways.
I know each day will bring its task,
And being blind, no more I ask.

I do not know the use or name
Of that I spin;
I only know that someone came
And laid within
My hand the thread, and said "since you
Are blind, but one thing you can do."

Sometimes the threads go rough and fast
And tangled fly.
I know wild storms are sweeping past,
And fear that I
Shall fall; but dare not try to find
A safer place, since I am blind.

I know not why, but I am sure
That tint and place
In some great fabric to endure
Past time and race,
My threads will have; so from the first,
Though blind, I never felt accurst.

I think perhaps this tint has sprung
From one short word
Said over me when I was young—
So young I heard
It, knowing not that God's name signed
My brow, and sealed me his, though blind.

But whether this be seal or sign
Within, without,
It matters not. The bond divine
I never doubt.
I know he sent me here, and still,
And glad, and blind, I wait his will.

But listen, listen, day by day,
To hear their tread
Who bear the finished web away
And cut the thread.
And bring God's message in the sun,
"Thou poor blind spinner, work is done."

—*H. H.*

Freedom of Man's Will or the Great Decision.

BY REV. C. LORIMER, D. D.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."—Joshua, xxiv. 15.

A great soldier calls on a great people to make a great decision. His dying words have never ceased to sound down the aisles of human history, and have never lost their sublime significance. They have carried with them not merely the announcement of a duty, but have proclaimed a doctrine of the gravest moment. Though the language in which both are expressed has been changed, and has been in accord with the peculiar circumstances of speaker and hearer, the thought has never been allowed to die and be forgotten. It broke on the attention of the world again in the urgent appeal of the prophet on Carmel: "How long halt ye between two opinions; if the Lord be God serve Him;" and again in the lamentations of another prophet: "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel!" and once more in the regretful reproaches of the Son of Man: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and puttest them to death, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her brood, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate." And, today, wherever there is moral earnestness in the pulpit, and when preachers realize that they are not called to charm groups of triflers with delightful essays, in some form the same high thought struggles for utterance, and the people are constrained to ponder a momentous summons demanding an immediate answer.

Two orders of men are generally fatalists—the self-conceited and the unfortunate. The former regard themselves as the children of destiny, for whom a place in the temple of the ages has been prepared, and without whom its glory would be incomplete. To this class belong the Cæsars, the Napoleons and Mahomets, whose wonderful abilities were only equaled by their complacent confidence in their own guiding star. In the ranks of the second are to be found many of those unhappy ones who have failed in life's battle, with whom everything has fallen out badly, and who have steadily gone from loss to loss, or from crime to crime. Such people seem to derive comfort from the belief that they are the victims of fate; that they, too, would have succeeded if the Supreme Powers had only been propitious; and that, consequently, circumstances of something else beyond their control, and not themselves, are to blame for the disasters attending their career. They feel, as Shakspeare says it, "that they are villians by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, traitors by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that they are evil in by a divine thrusting on."

It is not to be denied that there is much in the philosophical speculations and the religious creeds of mankind to encourage such opinions. In India, in Greece, in Arabia, as well as among Western nations, the most ancient faiths affirmed the doctrine of Necessity. Back of gods and men, and above them, in the Greek mythology reigned the unspeakable and unchargeable Fates, to whom the oppressed, like Prometheus, could appeal, and on whose final decisions everything from Olympus down to Hades absolutely depended. Buddha, also, and with him the wisest Eastern sages, regarded the race as practically in bondage to a Sovereign Soul, and as swing along a pre-ordained course to its final goal. He had no logical place in his system for will-freedom, and was as far from doing justice to its phenomena as Spinoza, Mr. Mill or Mr. Buckle.

The mention of these names suggests the singular trend of modern inquiry. Instead of its moving in a different direction, it has actually turned toward the muddy speculations of the past, and instead of rolling onward like an emancipated stream to a great ocean it has gone backward to the stagnant waters of dead systems. Diderot, the French encyclopedist, gave expression to this retrogression when he wrote: "Examine it narrowly, and you will see that the word liberty is a word devoid of meaning; that there are not, and that there cannot be, free beings; that we are only what accords with the general order, with our organization, our education, and the chain of events. These dispose of us invincibly." Since his day this view has grown amazingly, and has infected our methods of thought touching alike subjects moral and historical. And it has been immensely strengthened by the powerful influence of Herbert Spencer. The synthetic philosopher plainly teaches (*Principles of Psychology*, pp. 500, 503, *vol.* 1) that the notion of free-will is a subjective illusion, that if psychical changes conform to law there cannot be any such thing as free-will, and that what we call volition has no determining element in it, but is merely a mechanical commingling in one stream of force of those nerve-currents which result in action. These sentiments widely prevail. They are more or less explicitly inwrought in so-called scientific schemes of the universe, and they have drifted into popular speech; and consequently we should not be surprised that they lead successful men to regard themselves as the favorites of blind fortune, and incline those who have neither sufficient virtue nor energy to succeed to consider themselves blameless, the unhappy victims of uncontrollable circumstances.

This, however, is not the doctrine of the Scriptures. The Bible not only directly affirms the moral liberty of God's intelligent creatures, but its entire revelation proceeds on the assumption that they are free to choose. And in my judgment, so clearly in this view emanated in the Sacred Book, that could it be proven beyond question that intelligent creatures are as helpless to decide for themselves and to govern themselves as the material magnitudes of the universe are, no confidence could be reposed in the Heavenly origin of the volume; for it would not only be affirming a philosophical untruth, but it would be absurdly advocating as a basis of morals a principle that has no existence. Eden's garden and the fall lose their significance unless Adam was free. Any other supposition changes the character of that tragic scene which has exerted so vast an influence on the race from a reality to a sham, from the tremendous act of a responsible being to the pre-arranged motions of a puppet pulled by the fingers of a sensation-loving Fate. So, when we come to study Redemption, the Bible does not hesitate to teach that its efficacy depends on the volition of the sinner, and that he is really able to accept or reject eternal life.

Some among my people may think that in taking this view of its teachings I am governed by a sad predilection for Pelagianism. But such is not the case. Augustin, who is one of the original opponents of that system, in his controversial writings says: "For who is there of us would say that by the sin of the first man free-will is utterly perished from mankind?" And Archbishop Usher, one of the firmest adherents of the ultra orthodox school, writes: "Freedom of will we know doth as essentially belong unto a man as reason itself; and he that spoileth him of that power doth in effect make him a very beast." I am only in sympathy with such minds as these when I declare that the Sacred Canon recognizes this freedom, and therefore holds the sinner accountable for his condition before God. On what other hypothesis can such passages as these be explained: "See I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live;" "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely;" "Ye would not come unto me that ye might have life;" "He came to His own, and His own received Him not, but to as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God;" and "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and render an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or ill." Here the power of man to array himself on the side of right is distinctly expressed, and his responsibility for not doing so is solemnly declared. According to the spirit of these texts, taken in connection with those which describe the trial of our first parents in Paradise, the Divine Being has been and is seeking the free service of humanity.

* * * *

He would hear the voice of one creature sounding amid the frightful monotony of this measureless mechanism called the universe, which, if it were crushed beneath His hand, would be unconscious of its ruin, exclaiming, "Infinite Wisdom, Thy will is my will; it is preferred even to my own: there is none other that I delight to follow and there is none other that commands alike the allegiance of my reason and the homage of my conscience." To win this acknowledgement and to render real what it expresses, God at the first placed man under conditions of trial, for how could he choose unless two ways were open before Him? Alas! he turned aside from rectitude and followed his own headstrong impulses, and the sublime purpose of his Creator was frustrated. But not forever was it thwarted. Christ Jesus appeared, redemption from the evils entailed by transgression was provided, and a new path was manifest by which the original design of the Almighty in man's creation could be fulfilled. Had it been ordained that he could be saved without any personal volition he would have been delivered from penal suffering, but God's primal purpose would have been dishonored. To magnify that and to accomplish the end that He has had before Him from the eternities the guilty must choose to be saved and must choose to be saved in the way acceptable to the Almighty. Thus does he come into willing submission to the Divine will; thus is a free service now developed in a universe where bondage is the rule; and thus it is proven that the creature, however maimed and injured by the fall, can and must decide for himself, and is in reality the arbiter of his own destiny.

Doubtless this interpretation of the Bible will to some minds be regarded as incompatible with what it seems to teach concerning the Gods' sovereignty. Unquestionably there is an appearance of contradiction; and yet I do not think it is as serious as many suppose. We know that even among men a great many wills come into play, and that frequently they coincide without infringing on each other; and why may not the same be possible on the part of the Creator and the creature. But when we meditate on this subject we should remember that we tread the border-land of two worlds—the natural and the supernatural—and that, like all other domains, it is next to impossible to tell how and where they flow into each other. Scientists find it difficult to trace the exact boundaries between the vegetable and animal kingdoms; they cannot tell exactly where the one ends and the other begins, and neither can they explain how and why they interpenetrate each other. Psychologists are equally perplexed. They are constrained to admit the relations between mind and brain to be inexplorable. There are phenomena which cannot be accounted for on any theory that does not admit a mysterious interaction between the mental and the physical. The animal nature in man runs into the spiritual, and the point of transition is too vague and shadowy even for a metaphysical microscope to detect.

The same principle must surely hold in connection with the lower and the higher, with the world that lies within the range of our senses and that world which lies beyond. The natural must gradually merge into the spiritual, the fringes of each must interblend and mix, and the colors of the first must sometimes be charged with the hues of the second. No one can successfully deny the movements of history in which the Divine has been manifest in the human—as in the Incarnation, the founding of Christianity and in those surprising providences which have vindicated right and confounded wrong—and yet no one can explain their harmony with the human, or prove that they in any way intrenched upon its freedom. The meeting-place is veiled from us. Neither can we see in the application of redemption where these twain meet, how they interact on each other, and how they do so without limiting the power of the one or controlling the freedom of the other. Contact and interpenetration here is like contact and interpenetration in other departments of God's wonderful cosmos, an unsearchable mystery, a mist covered ocean, where only wreck awaits us if we insist on braving its darkness. But the fact that they are not without correspondences may assure us also that they are not without reason. We may therefore have confidence in them, and may sincerely believe, however the Almighty may influence and move the creature in bringing him to accept eternal life, that He does not fail to respect the soul's liberty of choice, and is under no necessity of doing so.

Were not the Scriptures as decisive as they are on this general subject, I should be inclined to the doctrine already set forth by considerations of the weightiest character. What these are I shall briefly set before you that you may be delivered from the illusions of modern fatalism, if unhappily you have been caught in their wiles.

I would first of all remind you that some of the profoundest philosophers such as Kant, Jacobi and Hamilton, contend that consciousness is the most reliable witness of what we are, and that it testifies to our moral freedom. Analyze your own nature, and see whether it does not confirm the report which these thinkers give of its dignity.

Do you not find that it discriminates between the voluntary and the involuntary, and that it attaches responsibility to the one and irresponsibility to the other? It neither praises nor condemns the pulsations of the heart, but it attaches a moral quality to the actions of the hands, and that because the first is necessary, while the second are not. It recognizes a power to do or to refrain from doing, and it associates with this power the idea of obligation. At times it justifies itself, and then pronounces judgment on its own deeds, and treats itself as though it recognized no compulsion determining its conduct. Let any man look within himself, and he will hear many voices declaring that he is free. Conscience, as it reproves him for wrongdoing, says, or there is no meaning in its voice, "Thou art free;" remorse, dogging his footsteps and driving him from place to place, thunders in his ear, or his terror is absurd, "Thou art free;" deliberation, as it ponders two paths and balances the reasons in favor of each, whispers distinctly, or this care and forethought are superfluous, "Thou art free;" and desire, as it sways him and develops in his soul fierce contests with convictions of right or of prudence, proclaims above the battle, "Thou art free!" Thus he has the witness in himself, and if he doubts its reliability he may easily satisfy it by appealing from within to without.

* * * *

The freedom of man's will is vitally associated with the idea of mortality. They are inseparable. Kant has exerted himself to show that they stand or fall together, and enters with so much zeal upon his task that he sometimes makes them appear synonymous. He says: "We have now reduced the Idea of Morality to that of Freedom of Will," and in another place he writes, "Autonomy of Will is the alone foundation of Morality." Hamilton likewise, following the sage of Koningsberg, declares that "virtue involves liberty;" "that the possibility of morality depends on the possibility of liberty; for if man be not a free agent he is not the author of his actions, and has, therefore, no responsibility—no moral responsibility—at all." In opposition to this position, we find Spencer ("*Data of Ethics*," p. 127) asserting that "the sense of duty or moral obligation is transitory;" and he has certainly allowed no permanent place for it in his system. Now, I insist that we find here one of the strongest reasons for upholding the doctrine of free will. Under the declining sense of its truthfulness the color and meaning are disappearing from the idea of duty. Indeed, we rarely hear a word now about "duty," but endless talk about "rights." We are ready to fight and contend for "rights;" but, alas! our zeal for "duties" groweth cold. Were there more regard for the latter and less for the former the church would not be as forsaken as it is, debts would not oppress it as they do, and there would be fewer alienations than there are. Unfortunately, as it is, even in the Kingdom of Christ pastors and members are too clamorous for their rights to have much time or heart for duty. They are busy mainly in standing on their dignity, in resenting what they are pleased to call interference with their work, and in refusing to be imposed on by those who are not willing to carry their own burdens. Let all this sensitiveness and jealousy end, and let every one simply attend to duty, and be anxious to render obedience to duty, and the millennium would speedily dawn. We need duty to be preached today from every pulpit, to every church, to every trade, to every political party. Surely the fact that such a necessity exists ought to convince us that the source of all this laxity is foul and false, and that duty will never come to be performed until the freedom of man's will is everywhere proclaimed and realized.

Finally, I insist on this doctrine, as it is the key to man's greatness. It shows that he is endowed with a wonderful and real power of conquering what to the faint-hearted seems the unconquerable. Hamilton teaches that man "is capable of carrying the law of duty into effect in opposition to solicitations, the impulsions of his material nature;" and he declares that liberty is "capable of resisting and conquering the counteraction of our animal nature." Kant likewise says: "the instincts of man's physical nature give birth to obstacles which hinder and impede him in the execution of his duty. They are, in fact, mighty opposing forces which he has to go forth and encounter." What a grand conception is here presented of the will striving with the inner enemies and overcoming their hostility. And if it can subdue inner foes can it not resist and repel outer antagonists? Such, at least, is Schlegel's belief as set forth in "The Philosophy of Life," and such is the conviction of Shakespeare when he sings:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to Heaven: the fated sky
Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull
Our slow designs, when we ourselves are dull.

What nobler image of human greatness can you form than that which is suggested by a man who measures his strength with manifold antagonists, who grapples with them, and like the valiant Knight described by Eckehard, overwhelms them all? Such a man is conscious of indwelling power, and believes that if he fails the fault is not in his stars but in himself. It is this conviction—this will-power—that has sustained the world's leaders and heroes; it displays itself in Columbus and Magellan, in Livingston and Carey, and in all those, whether in peace or in war, at home or abroad, who have patiently, perseveringly and self-sacrificingly, labored, endured and conquered. These are the men whom we honor, these are the men who honor the race. By their side how weak, mean and abject appear those who have no energy, and who seek to exterminate their uselessness by cursing their evil surroundings. Such an order of irresolute creatures we cannot but condemn, and we cannot but condemn as false and pernicious, the wretched philosophy which brings them aid and comfort.

On the foregoing grounds I rest my belief in man's moral agency, and in conclusion briefly remind you of its solemn import. The Psalmist declares that God's people shall be "willing in the day of His power," or as some writers have it, on the day when He shall gather his forces. When He manifests Himself either in the potencies of His Son's priesthood, as revealed in the psalm, or in the hour of triumph when His enemies shall be subdued, they who are His shall not be so through compulsion, nor through an irresistible Omnipotence, but through their own free and deliberate choice. What you are, therefore, my people, through all eternity depends on your own election. Do you reply that you cannot renew yourselves, that you cannot repair the damage which sin has wrought in your souls, and that you can no more subdue the high waves of passion than Canute could control the advancing tide? True, and yet are you responsible for your choice. I do not claim that your volition can change your nature, but I do claim that you are accountable for it, as your volition decides whether your nature shall be brought within the influence of Heaven's grace or not. Mere volition never built a ship, or a house, won a battle or accomplished a voyage; and neither did it ever sanctify a soul. There is a difference between "will" and "power." The "will" to be saved is of man, the "power" is of God. But whosever wills cannot fail to find the power; for He has promised to confer on all such the water of life freely. For your choice then you are accountable, and your eternal destinies hang on your volition. This is the climax of our sermon. This is the conclusion I would have you contemplate honestly without shrinking. You can defy the Almighty; you can resist all good influences; you can thrust from you the appeals of heaven; you can live irreligiously and die hopelessly; you can make your life a blessing or a curse, and your death a triumph or defeat. "Which? Which is it to be?" "He hath set fire and water before thee, stretch forth thy hand unto whither thou wilt." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" It is for you, then, to come to a decision, and I have termed it "great," as it determines your destiny for time and eternity. Shall it not be wisely made, as Joshua demanded of the Hebrews, "today"—*this day*, NOW? Believe me, the motion of your will toward the exalted Christ, will bring down upon your soul the power needed to break from the world and from the tyranny and oppression of iniquity.

"Will you to Mount Zion go?
Will you seek the Lord or no?"

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We need to learn well the truth that only the Master's hand can bring out of our souls the music that slumbers in them. A violin lies on the table, silent and still. We know that it is capable of giving out marvelous music. One weak hand takes it up and begins to draw the bow across the strings, but it yields only harsh, wailing discords. Then a master comes and takes it up. First he tunes the strings into tune, and then he brings from the little instrument most entrancing strains. Our lives are like this violin. They are capable of producing rich and beautiful melody. But they must be skillful hands that touch the chords.—*J. R. Miller, D. D.*

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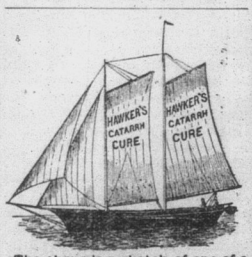

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