No. 76.

Errors concerning the Almighty.
Psalm 15.21. "Thou thoughtest that I spake together such as one of yourself?"

On no subject, perhaps, has the human mind displayed so much of its weakness, so much of its strength, in nothing has it departed so much from the follies of a child, so soared to the height where angels tread, as in its conception and reasonings concerning the divine nature and character. And from what we know of the faculties of man, we might perhaps expect that when applied to such a subject, they would exhibit such contradictions. In the very nature of all views or enquiries concerning the great First Cause, there is something that one causes the mind to a certain kind...
have arrived to appear revolting or grand. The subject is too sublime to admit any attempt upon it to assume an end front character. The notions, where poor and grumbled, will seem doubtfully from the grandeur of the object, about which they are formed, when the ideas, where pure and elevated, will stem from the same source, receive a character of sublimity. The object itself, while it sets the deficiency of grandeur in a strong light, will communicate to the latter something of its own grandeur. Man kind have never been without the idea of Deity in some shape or other, though it has been often polluted or disfigured by ignorance or imagination. The minds of a portion of the human race, more, as we are taught, not to understand something of the nature of character of the one true God. But the greatest part were left to gather what they could on this single subject, from the signs of nature, and the saw around them. The footsteps of divine beings everywhere on earth; one eye was so dull, that it might not observe them. But reason could not tell the more, than tell of the existence of some mighty superhuman power. In the early ages men seemed to have had the idea of one Supreme, unbounded God. The first thought seems to have been, that the different parts of the kingdom of nature were assigned to different deities. The number of deities was multiplied without end, and scarcely a mountain or a stream was left without its peculiar deity. In these cases, human agents were attributed some of the most of human passions, human virtues, human desires. Another factor, men took in the path of error, was to destroy these false deities. Those who had distinguished themselves by important discoveries or important services were raised to the rank of gods; though they were the same frail beings, as those from whom they received the tribute of adoring praise. Yet in the course of ages and ages, as those from whom they received the tribute of adoration, praise, the man of folly, superstition, these occasionally became better light. Nay, then, thus arose com
glory, & loneliness, man kind in their motions causing God have sometimes singularly gone astray from the simplicity & beliness of the instructions of the prophets many others the plain discrepancy as well as to the few errors mentioned by the Prophet, we may observe here a thought. Errors among the such as amongst these. They are the errors concerning the character of sin. 1979, who have prevailed even among the followers of errors.

The sentiment of the text may suggest to us some reflections on these false, mistaken, & erroneous modes of thinking & speaking concerning the Deity & his moral government, which are so common among man kind. I do not mean refer to the whole number of men who have such and sometimes walk abroad in the face of day to insult and insult men. It is not of those who can see my folly, my partiality against the majority of Heaven, that we are led to speak. It is rather the few common errors which are held by those, perhaps, who are fiercely disposed,
that our attention is now directed. Coming in the last does by no means imply simplicity in the heart. We know there are those who humble their souls before God, who reverence his perfections, fear his name, & bow to his will; y who yet have very indistinct ideas of perhaps very unworthy ideas of the nature of govern- ment. Whether it be that we are capable of think- ing on this subject with that strictness, tranquility, & seriousness, & its greatness demands, is that most people are satisfied with such ideas, as have been entertained by others, & are willing to be spared the pain of thinking at all on the subject, certain it is that there is & has been among these, who would in the light of the true revelation, a strong tendency to adopt notions concerning the Deity, from which it would be vain to attempt to find support in the mind of God, or in the principles of reason. And though these ideas, so long as they remain dead in the mind, are never thought of as principles of action, may exist with the most peaceful dispositions, & the most devout habits, yet when they become operative, & exert a bringing & growing influence on the affairs, their influence may be more pernicious, than we can easily estimate. Experience at least seems to tell us that they are like a weak, ripe, while it remains unripe, it is harmless, but let it once break its bounds & find a course, it probably will spread destruction far & wide.

As an instance of the errors, to which our minds are exposed, how uncertain is it to call the mind? Sometimes have thought & do think of the secret plans & designs of God. It is not, indeed, for a being like man, who as we know hastily from the devil to the devil, does but cast a glance at the works of the Almighty, it is not for such a being to understand all the purposes of Conscience. The government, on an infinite mind, necessity over a boundless creation, may require means & operations, the end of which we cannot comprehend. There are other worlds besides our own, & there are other species of beings beside ourselves; who shall pretend to follow the chain of God's purposes through
out these worlds, through these varieties of being, and what the designs of Deity may require? When we consider the subject in this light, it seems to me, we are like children gazing in confusion wonder'd from the shore on the vast expanse of the ocean that has bore them. It is the sublime and silencing question of Scripture, who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? But, though we cannot fathom the counsels of Jehovah, yet we are equally justified in saying, that as far as they are known to us, we must suppose them consistent with infinite rectitude and infinite purity. As far as they concern man-kind, they must be adapted to our nature, faculties, as moral agents. And yet if we examine the accounts, it has sometimes been given of the purposes of God's design, respect to man, we shall find, if not inconsistent with performances of divine characters. Can we believe that that Being, who is the Source of all purity and rectitude; that nature is perfect rectitude, would institute arbitrary decrees to affect the eternal condition of man, without the least reference to his character and capacities? But is it not the principle assumed by those, who would teach us, that the benefits of God, both as respects to man, have been unalterably fixed from all eternity, that long before every sinner is born? This condition of humanity is sealed, that God has designated those who are to be saved, and rejected those who are to be everlastingly cut off from his favour, why then have God's pleasure, without the least regard to man's character? And this inflexible pleasure, we are told, is a principle of tears, no holiness of heart or purity of life can ever shake for a moment: a man may love the saint, but the name does not stand on the roll of the blessed, written on in the foreordained ages of eternity; it is all in vain, salvation is not destined for them. And when we turn to these, who present us such new truths, and tell them that in Scripture the meanest grace is the object to the favours of God are offered to all, who will accept them, they assure us, that though such be the open declaration of the Almighty's will, yet that his secret
in the way of peace? Why all this prostration of moral means. If the moral end is to be effected. 8. of the condition of each one of us is already unmistakably fixed by his secret decree. What would you think of the parents, who should secretly determine to keep all his favour, one of his children, to exclude the others from his bountiful regards. 8. yet should hold out to them all the offer of the same help, 8. the promise of the same reward? Tell you not say that this was the harshest mockery, the most oppressive tyranny? But this is precisely the conduct ascribed to God by those whose eyes are closed to just or devoted. And is not this making God allegiance such as ourselves? is it not ascribing to him all the impartiality, the weakness, or the caprice of man?

Another class of these errors, of which we treat, is to be found in the modes of thinking 8 speaking concerning the attributes of God, we have sometimes permitted. It is but too common to represent the attributes of God as standing each one where, without bringing any rational term, receiving any modification from
the other perfections of the divine nature. We have sought for some one simple principle, to which we might ascribe all the operations & designs of the infinite Mind; as if there was but one Subsistence, attributable to all the rest more subordinate. But it is impossible for us ever to have consistent & elevated views of the character of God, while we thus separate it into various parts, & consider only such portions as we may choose to call soberly important. It is as if the light of the sun were to be divided into its distinct rays, each ray left to shine freely & separately, instead of spreading around us, as now, a luminous expansion of glory. This habit has been the source of many errors in theology. Thus we are told that the justice of God compels Him to inflict pain & punishment from which He would gladly spare us, to require satisfaction for which He would ardently desire. His justice is represented as inconceivable, enjoining how to yield. His mercy struggles against it, magnifies it, & turns from its stern pursuance, but in vain: that which it cannot obtain it must go on, & maintain its claims still ever so little shall be satisfied. Nor is it most derogatory to the character of our Saviour, to most injureously to all pure & holy aspirations in the human breast, to separate the attribute of justice from its alliance with other attributes, to represent it as a blind enquiring principle of action. The justice of God must be avenged as mankind is guided by a regent to the best good of the whole universe; it is not combined with any thing like a spirit of vengeance or hatred, but includes within its view the whole story power; it is a free, and unreserved power, just as we can include within its view the whole of existence & all time. On the other hand, the mercy of God is sometimes represented not only as the mercy of God is sometimes represented not only as the mercy of God is sometimes represented not only as the mercy of God is sometimes represented not only as the.
of the Heavens, to inflict punishment even on the sinner. This, too, as well as the other, is a great & gross error. For if we consider the subject aright, we shall find that the mercy of God even requires him to punish sin. If transgressions were suffered to go without its recompense, if the laws of God could be violated with impunity, & the sinner were allowed to triumph over the prospect of happiness, would not moral pollution pervade the universe? & what would become of those blessings, nor now protect the inhabitants, that is left in the world? To prevent this dreadful ruin, God in mercy interposes. He punishes sin, that owing be checked, & virtue be encouraged. There are other erroneous modes of representing the divine attributes, from the same fault mentioned in the text, stemming from God to be altogether such as ourselves. We find for instance, that men in the exercise even of what is called reason, may be considered as good qualities, frequently forced to extremes. & from all the effect of good principles by acts knowing how to regulate the exercise of them. In the exercise of justice, they forget to be merciful, & when they would be merciful they lose all regard to justice; yet it is because we oppose practically, if not in theory, the Deity to be governed by the same weak & fluctuating principles, that we cherish such views of his attributes, as if they were correct would tarnish even the glory of his throne.

One more instance of the errors, of which we speak, is to be found in the views, wh men entertain of the providence of God. Their conceptions on this subject are too narrow & limited. We acknowledge, it is true, one to suppose, as the government of God; & we look to him generally, as the judge & helper with the highest feelings of trust, & the sentiment of dependence. But we are very much disposed to infer our passions or our wishes to mingle with their own; & our estimate of the providence of God. There is a strong tendency in the human mind to interpret the dealings of the Heavens, as judgments or as rewards, to consider them in particular cases, as proofs of favor or as marks of anger. Nothing can be more capricious, &
in many cases more enchantable, than such an application of the events of life. When a severe calamity befalls a man, or man, whose principles of conduct are like, or who have become, from whatever cause, obnoxious to us, we are easily persuaded to interpret it as a judgment from heaven, y to say that providence has dispensed to them its measure of justice. On the other hand, let but our friends, those whom we love, y whom we revere, experience some signal instance of success or good fortune; we immediately say, perhaps, that the hand of heaven is in this, y that virtue is publicly receiving its reward. When my apt to talk as if we believed, that God loves those whom we love, y hates those whom we hate. Now Solomon says, how foolish is it, but how preposterous is it, thus to circumscribe the providence of God within the narrow circle of particularities of prejudices, y to mark y give the sensations of heaven, in just the same proportion as they seem to agree, with our wishes y to flatter our selfish, local feelings. I do mean, that we should not ever be ready to see & adore the operations of God's providence. The devout mind will find it easier, wherever it turns, y gratefully adore his wisdom y power.

But while we cherish this spirit, let us not appropriate the events of providence to our own interests y our own feelings. Let us look upon them with a little more leniency of soul, remembering that God governs not by partial, but by general laws, that we are not the only beings in the universe, y that our petty favors, y only pleasures, the universe, y only our petty prejudices are not of importance enough to call for the interposition of heaven to gratify them. Let us look upon the lightning not as the minister of heaven's displeasure to our enemies, but as one of the exhibitions of the power of God, y upon the sunshine, not merely as it shines on our fields, y conveys health, but as it dispels the clouds on our faces, y conveys delight to our friends. Let it be the smile of God's mercy on the world.

I have just hinted at some classes of the errors, as we are so subject, in our views of the nature y character of God. They proceed principally from the cause pointed out in the text, from supposing God to be alto-
gather such as ourselves," from carrying the fruitless
man into our meditations on the perfection of God. We
have passions & interjections ourselves; you live amongst
these, who have the same passions & interjections; we see the
best qualities of mankind enfeebled & corrupted by im-
pure mixtures, we see reverence become childish wor-
ship, application of its well meant efforts, justice
converted into cruelty or vengeance, by an impelling or in-
ductive spirit, & almost every virtue assuming more or less
of some kindred vice. In calculating on the motives of
men, we learn to make much allowance for faults &
corruptions. Now when we come to reflect on the nature
of Deity, it is difficult to shake off those
all these associations, & habits of thought, which we have
in the contaminating intercourse of the world; thus we
liberate our minds, of the imagination, make God all that
such as ourselves, from these influences, we should
strive to rescue our minds. It is my fervor elevate
thoughts that we should bring to this subject. When
we thus come as it were, into the presence of God, like

Most high & mighty God, then art the source of
wisdom's the fountain of light; we who are brittle
ash, frail, blind, erring creatures, would look up to
thee, beseeching thee the enlightenment as in the knowledge
all truth, to give us the wisdom that is from above.
Especially would we pray, that we may from just
worthy conceptions of thee, as our God, our Father, our
King, that we may understand right thy charac-
ter, purposes, and will. Save us from all errors respecting
thy government, thy duties to thee. Enable us always to
live, as in thy fear & presence. And if upon us the spirit
of generations is love for thee. Teach us to set thee always
before us, to make us

We thank thee for our opportunities of religious instruction
& improvement. Folloe with thy servant whatsoord has
been said & agreeably to thy word. Be with us & bless us in
our several stations & relations in life & finally receive us to
The kingdom of thy glory.

Moses at the burning bush, we should put off sin, knowing that the ground is holy, because God Himself walked there.

Aug. 1820.
At Mr. Pierpont's. Feb. 16. 1825. - forenoon.