No. 180.

The agency of God of man in salvation.
Philippians II, 12, 13. — "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Here, then, are brought to our view two principles which seem at first sight not very consistent with each other. The ability of man to work out his future happiness, with the assistance of divine agency of God, are topics about which theologians have agitated. Still rational men perhaps are tired of the mention of them. And yet it is important to find divine truth, even if we are compelled to seek it amidst briars and thorns. The prevalent opinions on the subject, suggested by the text, may be divided into two general classes. In the first place, there are those who think that man can do nothing towards procuring his own future happiness: God is the only agent in the universe, man is but a passive subject of imperfect influences, all the work of salvation is to be done in us, for us, by God conferring heaven upon us, by his own intervention according to his sovereign will, not because there
is any thing in us to fix us for such a reward? Indeed, the place there are those who think that man is an agent under God in the work of his own salvation: that by the energy of God he is so formed, that he can do something to procure future blessedness; and in fact, for that very purpose he is placed on this world. The first of these notions evidently destroys all notion of man's accountability, personal freedom; the other is thought by some to degrade mightily, or sovereign grace, as they call it, of its peculiar honours or preservatives, to inflate man with too high a notion of his own power. But in St. Paul's view of the subject, there is no passing, no contradiction. We are to make ourselves; yet at the same time, it is God that ordains us. We see by this, that the Apostle, and not thinking on the one hand, that man can do nothing for his own salvation, nor on the other, that man is all sufficient. If we could do nothing, we should not be directly to relate our salvation with fear and trembling, if we were independent of all things and, one should not be told that it is by the order in us both to will and to do for our own good pleasure: there is harmony, there is simplicity, in the view of the Aesthetic for the reason was underestimated into the schemes of modern system makers, but scripture speaks of the reward of the

the truth in godly sincerity.

There is in the text an exhortation, an argument, by it, let us consider each of these, you shall find them rich in instructive meaning. Taken together, they amount to this: God gives us the power and the ability to do something for our salvation: it is our duty to do it. Consider the text as equivalent to the following: it is our duty to use with reverence, solicitude, all the means of salvation, for it is God that gives us these means of salvation, i.e., doing good. Here are pointed out the source of all our moral agency, the solemn obligation we are under to exercise it.

1. First call your attention to the exhortation, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” And here ask, what is salvation? The question may appear to every one, but simple as it is, it may be asked, whether the mass of mankind could give a very satisfactory, definite answer to it. Salvation is one of the theological words, oaths are used in a most shadowy, distinct manner, though in every body's mouth, they have a sort of mystical air thrown around them, that quite removes them from the common understanding of rational minds. Scripture speaks of the reward of the
righteous in the highest strain of figurative language; this language is by most people taken literally; this salvation is supposed to mean being excelled to a certain state of outward glory, in the idea of aang imagination is little else than a vain show, or to the condition of perfect rest, or as it is usually taken as a better than eternal existence. By this salvation is supposed to mean the rescue of being from the jaws of destruction, from the grave house of horror, by overcoming even the destruction of the world, by a state of assurance and triumph, with nothing to do, but forces to repeat the story of victory of price. Now all such ideas as these are free from being spiritual; they do not consider as a moral being, I have in fact no reference to moral excellence in any way. To the question what is salvation? I answer, it is elevated moral happiness; it is a word that expresses a certain state of the mind's heart, that state which makes it like for pure and spiritual activity; it has no relation to sense or sense of existence. It is being rescued from its power, not from a state of nature; it is not a fancy, not of imagination, a smell of passion; but it is a high and noble condition of moral excellence, corresponding to mental enjoyment. Not of this the best are to work out our salvation by working out moral goodness, or are to work out moral goodness by the diligent use of our means and of all the means of opportunities of becoming good. This is true, may seem like a very simple and perhaps trivial representation of the matter; but if I believe so reflecting minds it will appear itself, as true and scriptural. If you ask then, how may we work out our salvation? I will ask him who is to become good, is to become a Christians. Those who have answered one question, you have an answer to the other. The whole course of this providence and all the acts of religion help us to work out our salvation in this way. All that tends to raise, purify, or sanctify our nature, that excites devotion and reverence towards God, it makes us our dependence upon account to call to him, whatever gives us the disposition to cleave to the treasures of our soul, religion, to imbibe its spirit, from our lives when it is not only for its profit or hope, all these things help us to work out our salvation. all these things thus refer us spiritual excellence. Do you go abroad and observe the number of the people of providence in the world among you? And does this now apply and to the great extent of all? does it fit you?
with profound sentiments of devotion, reverence, gratitude, and love. This then helps to work out your salvation. Do you study the gospel of Jesus every day to understand it better, to practice it more sincerely, to love it more fervently? Do you obey the heavenly command of Jesus, to cry into your own lives every thing of the virtues of grace, so to imitate this? do you learn from him to love your God above all things, your neighbor as yourself, to be mild, forgiving, earnest in doing good? This too must surely help you toward your own salvation. Do you look at the examples of those who are good in all ages, till you grow, earnest with aspiration, to catch a reflection of their virtues of some hearth? This is surely upon in the progress of moral progress; and consequently of salvation. Do you listen with trembling anxiety to the voice of conscience, do its reprofs follow you with alarm, do its apprehension throw over you, and the most exquisite happiness? Then, in this respect, you are working out your salvation. Do you examine your own heart, and the impurity of your actions, so as to make an account at the great tribunal of heaven? Do you place the scale of infinite value, worth of following you, so as, if resolved by the help of the Holy, to turn from all the errors of your ways? This surely will give you strength to work out your own salvation. So, too, there is no way of avoiding the work of salvation.

Now to all this mode of representing the matter, it is very common to objects, that it is leaving man too much agency in the task of his salvation. That it is teaching him to depend too much on himself, is not enough for the grace of God. But this objection is exceedingly false. We do not teach man to depend on himself any more than he has taught and required him to depend on himself. We only say that man must use the means of life that he has provided; may more, that if he does not use the means he is guilty in the highest degree. We do not make us agents, if we are not to act; but, on the contrary, we do not give us the interests of eternal duration, human nature any longer than he has taught them to us. We do our best to extenuate the justice, of God, the means, of moral happiness, so that our consequence is that this depends not only on his power, but that it is out of all power of any other created power to fit him. No power can make one good without one's own.
of his great work... But tell us, that the Author selected him for a subject, with the view to exercise his peculiar powers, by giving him without any effort of his own, what is more likely to engender spiritual pride, to induce the look down as from an eminence with contempt on all others. By saying, then, with the Apostle, that man must work out his salvation or be not any that he must effect any more for himself, than he demands him to effect.

2. We have the powerful argument, by which the matter in question is enforced; "for it is God who worketh in man both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." As I have already stated, there is no inconsistency between this declaration of the receptivity of man, and the consideration. Man must work; but he must work under the materials of means which God has given him on the work, and which he has pointed out. Thus it is, that the Author speaks in us, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. All the opportunities we have of religious instruction or improvement, all the considerate objects that excite good motives, stimulate to purity of heart and life, to mental and moral growth...
the powerful warning voice of conscience, all that
we know by the light of nature. What is once all
that we know by the blessed light of revelation, its
discoveries, its prospects, its examples, its sanctifying
influences, its supporting hopes of consolation, all these
come from God, as they work in us to will and to do.
In the same manner we say, God causes the
fruits of the earth to grow; yet no one, I presume
ever supposed that by this was meant the immi-
diate agency of God in bringing forth the productions
of the earth. The immediate causes are the refreshing
shower of rain, the warm influences of the sun, the
nutritive power of the soil. By the agency of these cas-
es, God blesses us with the abundant harvest. And
so too by the agency of moral means, God enables us
to obtain salvation. The instructions, practices, sanctions
of scripture, the admonitions of conscience, all the
essential truths of religion are to our hearts, what
the rain is to the sun, the sun to the soil. Nor as these
like all our blessings come from God, we may with
great justice and propriety say, that God is the au-
thor of our salvation. Its certainly is the author
of that grace and not to obtain without the same
will be vain... We are therefore to ascribe salvation to
the wisdom, mercy, with which he has arranged the cause
of spiritual improvement, of bestowing upon us the power
of the opportunities of doing his will...

I know that such a representation will not be thought
by some to include the whole of the case. There are
those who believe that God works in man in a much more
direct and peculiar manner. Salvation is sometimes ascribed
wholly to extraordinary influences of the Spirit of God
acting upon the human mind in an irresistible manner,
yielding the moral agency of man. God, we are told
from his own good pleasure, pours out his spirit upon
whom he will, if they cannot fail of becoming objects
of his grace... Not in fact this means any thing but
present from the representation we have already given.
I think it to be an error... And the errors, however
is chiefly founded in the improper use of applying
the language of Scripture. We read much of men, who
were moved by the spirit of God. Of the spirit of God
being poured out upon men... of the riches of the grace
of God... The hand of expression, though Calvine us
are doubtless familiar with... Now these expressions
...thus perhaps no may expect like them supernatural assistance, but tell us must not expect God to interfere unnecessarily for us. I do deny, that at the present day, there may be instances of the influences of the Spirit of God, but I believe these influences can never be distinguished from the operations of our own minds. All kinds of this influence, our associations of affections on these objects, are not changed, the moment any enter in the subject of religion. It is by the operation of motives of some kind or other, that our views and affections are wrought upon, sometimes are suggested by a great variety of causes, by the events of providence, by alarming calamities, etc. We are very apt in the fervor of imagination to ascribe to that the immediate agency of God, it is merely the effect of natural causes. Is it true or not, that very many of what are called religious impressions are sometimes produced with regard to religious feelings; but they are of the same nature as our other impressions with regard to other things, except that they may be more forcible in proportion to the greater importance of the subject, may lead, oftener do lead, to a real sincere moral change? These effects are, may, if we choice, ascribe to the agency of God, but it is as an agency operating solely by the use...
of natural means. An instance of sudden shocking death, some alarming exhibition of address to the conscience, a great and dreadful calamity, may suddenly arrest the attention to religious things; the mind may dwell upon them, till it becomes conscious of shame; a sense of present moral danger may be pressed upon the heart; just as may come up in fearful remembrance; a deep and solemn anxiety to escape from the punishment of sin may be awakened. The experience of all this may be a startling check of the dispositions of the heart; the conduct of life. But this is all affected by the natural operation of these means, as God has established. By saying this, we do not debase the agency of God, or diminish the dependence upon all that we are at all that we have; all that we are solely to God. Suppose there is a certain weight, a man could not lift himself up from the ground. Some one puts into his hands a lever or enable him to lift it with ease; would you not say that this diminishes the means of raising the weight to the friend of mankind? By the weight of the lever upon the world, you would say, that it is the agent, who uses the means of raising the weight, and as it is with regard to the agency of God, so with regard to the agency of man in the work of salvation. The power, help, of means all come from God; the use improvements of these belong to man: thus it is, that g. visits us to all this if there is good pleasure, as thus it is, that man works out his own salvation.

There is no part of the constitution, in which nature is most noticed, but oh, which we would not fail to bear constantly in mind. We are not only to consider our salvation, but to do it with fear and trembling, as it is so perfectly done, with reverence and anxiety, reverence toward God a certainty for ourselves. This may express strongly the feelings, with which we should endeavor to the task of spiritual improvement, feelings of deep anxiety concern. And surely if there is anything which ought to all faith and feelings, it is this. No human being who thinks seriously on the subject, can be indifferent to his moral condition. None can think it a matter of no importance, whether not he be always conscious at last. When we reflect how much depends on our own actions, and how important it is that these actions be well directed, we cannot overlook that the whole directed this converts to works out the salvation with fear and trembling: none wonder that he is all that all their care, anxiety, presentness should be cast.
I have this, their great main concern. It was natural, say that the same exposition is equally applicable to us; therefore let us seek while the day lasts, knowing that the night is.

In conclusion, I would remark, that by how careful we should be to avoid these extremes, the rest of passion, passion, feelings have gained half their power on religious subjects. This gate was shut to the church we have briefly discussed. At the time of the reformation, coming to the opposite extreme of these errors, passing they departed. The Romish church had described the man a great deal of merit of human, who did not belong to the men, and imagined that a man might be an adequate witness of the Church as it were, whom something necessary for his own salvation, and that these might be add for the salvation of others. This opens of above error, naturally connected, innovation of this church; because the soul fights against the corruption of that most corrupt church. These men, hastened in their zeal to the opposite extreme, gathered the main men in his own salvation, as absorbing every thing to the immediate interests of the soul, counting good works to be out of place, splendid ones. This too was no less a great

nicious error; I have been but too much forgetful of the path between these extremes, even the path pointed out by the apostles in my text. Be not made out his own salvation with fear and trembling. At the same time, in his will, that it is God, who works in man both to will and deeds of his own good pleasure.

At home, Feb. 28th, 1825, forenoon.

It is not wrong in the work of salvation, faith or religion, hard to this support, lest in place we help only where the support, bless them. (Turn back).