

## LECTURE X.

### SPECIAL AND MIRACULOUS PROVIDENCE.

NEXT in importance to the question whether the Deity exists, is the inquiry whether he exerts any direct agency in upholding the universe, and in controlling its events. This point has been discussed in all ages in which there have been philosophers or theologians, and the current of opinion has fallen principally into three channels.

In the first place, some have removed the Deity entirely from his works into a fancied extra-mundane sphere, where in solitude he might enjoy the blessedness of his own infinite nature, without the trouble of directing the events of the universe, or watching over the works of his hand. Forgetful of the great principle, that the intellectual powers produce happiness only when called into exercise, they have fancied that the care of the universe must be a burden to its Creator, and that it would derogate from his dignity. It is supposed, therefore, that the world has been given up to the rule of fate or chance.

In the second place, a more numerous class have maintained that the Supreme Being, after creating the world, committed its preservation and government either to a subordinate agent, or to the laws which he impressed upon matter and mind, which possess an inherent power to execute themselves; so that, in fact, God exercises no direct and immediate agency in natural operations. The learned and usually profound Cudworth adopted the hypothesis of a *plastic nature*, as he terms it, by which he means a vital, spiritual, and unintelligent, yet subordinate agent, by whose agency the world is governed and its operation carried on. At first view, this hypothesis would seem to lead inevitably to atheism; but such was not the intention of its author. Still it is obviously so