

miracles has passed? When the pestilence is scouring through the land, and our neighbours and nearest friends are within its grasp, and we may next become its victims, nay, when we, too, are on the borders of the grave, why should we expect relief by prayer, since sickness is the result of natural causes, and God will not interpose to save us from the effects of natural evils, because that would be contrary to a fixed rule of his government? When dangers cluster around the good man in the discharge of trying duties, it would be enthusiasm in him to expect any special protection against his enemies, though he pray ever so fervently, and trust in divine deliverance with ever so much confidence. He must look to another world, for his reward, if called to suffer here. Nor has the daringly wicked man any reason to fear that God will punish his violations of the divine law by any unusual display of his power; not in any way, indeed, but by the evils which naturally flow from a wicked life. In short, it will be useless to pray for any blessing that requires the least interference with natural laws, or for the removal of any evil which depends upon those laws. And since our minds are controlled as much by laws as the functions of our bodies, we are not to expect any blessings in our souls, which require the least infringement of intellectual laws. In fine, the effect of prayer is limited almost entirely to its influence upon our own hearts, in preparing them to receive with a proper spirit natural blessings, and to bear aright natural evils; to stimulate us to use with more diligence the means of avoiding or removing the latter, and securing the former.

Not a few philosophers of distinction, and some theologians, have adopted these views. Even Dr. Thomas Brown uses the following language: "It is quite evident that even Omnipotence, which cannot do what is contradictory, cannot combine both advantages: the advantage of regular order in the sequences of nature, and the advantages of a uniform adaptation of the particular circumstances of the individual. We may take our choice, but we cannot think of a combination of both; and if, as is very obvious, the greater advantage be that of uniformity of operation, we must not complain of the evils to which that very uniformity which we cannot fail to prefer (if the option had been allowed us) has been the very circumstance that gave rise."—*Lecture 94.*