

“Science,” says George Combe, “has banished from the minds of profound thinkers belief in the exercise by the Deity, in our day, of special acts of supernatural power, as a means of influencing human affairs; and it has presented a systematic order of nature, which man may study, comprehend, and follow, as a guide to his practical conduct. Many educated laymen, and also a number of the clergy, have declined to recognize fasts, humiliations, and prayers, as means adapted, according to their views, to avert the recurrence of the evil, [the potato blight]. Indeed, these observances, inasmuch as they mislead the public mind with respect to its causes, are regarded by such persons as positive evils.”

“The most irreligious of all religious notions, as it seems to us,” says the North American Review, “is a belief in special providences; for if the doctrine has any weight at all, it is gained at the expence of a general providence. To assume to detect God as nearer to us on some occasions, is to put him father off from us on other occasions. To have him in special incidents is to forget him in the common tenor of events. The doctrine of special providences evidently has no other foundation than this, that men *think they can detect* God’s purpose and presence more signally in some incidents than in others; so that the doctrine, after all, is only a compliment to man’s power of detection, instead of an acknowledgment of God’s special presence.”

Such views and reasonings seem, upon a superficial examination, to be very plausible. But when we look into the Bible, we cannot but see that the main drift of it is directly opposed to such notions. That book does encourage man to pray to God for the removal of evils of every kind; evils as much dependent upon natural laws as the daily course of the sun through the heavens. It does teach us to look to God in every trying situation for deliverance, if it is best for us to be delivered. It does represent the wicked man as in danger of special punishment. It exhibits a multitude of examples, in which God has thus delivered those who trusted in him, and punished those who violated his laws.

In every age, too, the most devotedly pious men have testified, that they have found deliverance and support in circumstances in which mere natural laws could afford them no relief. Moreover, when men are brought into great peril or suffering