AN ESSAY ON NATIVE DEPRAVITY

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LEONARD WOODS

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AN

ESSAY

ON

NATIVE DEPRAVITY.

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NOTICE.

The premium of three hundred dollars which was awarded to the writer of the following Essay, was offered by Mr. John Dunlop of Edinburgh, Scotland. The Judges appointed were, the Reverend Jeremiah Day, D. D. L. L. D. President of Yale College, the Reverend Edward D. Griffin, D. D. President of Williams College, and the Reverend Heman Humphrey, D. D. President of Amherst College. The publication of the Essay was delayed some time, for the purpose of receiving the directions of Mr. Dunlop.

ESSAY

ON

NATIVE DEPRAVITY.

CHAPTER I.

Preliminary Remarks.

THE following remarks are intended to guard against wrong modes of reasoning, and to prepare the way for a just and profitable discussion of the subject.

First. The consideration of the divine character cannot be made the ground of any presumption against the doctrine of human sinfulness, and can have no influence to invalidate the arguments by which the doctrine is supported.

In reasoning on the present subject I shall proceed on the principle, that the existence and moral perfection of God have been satisfactorily proved, and are

unhesitatingly believed; and that he is a righteous and benevolent Governour. My position is, that this cannot be adduced as proof against the doctrine of man's apostacy and ruin.

No man can urge the moral character of God as an argument against the doctrine of man's depravity, except upon the supposition, that we are competent to determine, by our own reason, in what manner God's moral perfection will be developed. If we make an appeal to revelation or experience, we shall find what all Christians, and what the most enlightened of the heathen, have found and acknowledged; that man is the subject of a deep moral depravity. But suppose that we were now at the period immediately after the creation of man, and that, with our rational powers in full exercise, we should look upon the innocent, happy pair in the garden of Eden, under the inspection of their Creator, and enjoying his constant kindness. And suppose the inquiry should be made; "*Will these holy and happy beings ever become transgressors of God's righteous law? Will God suffer them to fall into sin? And will their posterity have their existence in a state of moral ruin?*" — What would be the proper answer to such an inquiry? — the answer which would accord with the truth? We might be inclined to say, such a disastrous event can never take place. God is infinitely good, and he will watch over his dependent, feeble creatures, and effectually guard them against all danger, especially against the pollution and ruin of sin. But if we