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ONE GOD THE FATHER;  
OR THE  
STRICT AND PROPER  
MONOTHEISM OF THE GOSPEL  
VINDICATED.

BY  
THOMAS FOSTER BARHAM, M.B. CANTAB.,  
MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS  
IN LONDON.

“To us there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ.”

PAUL.

Ἡ θαύματα πολλά· καὶ πόν τι καὶ βροτῶν φρένας,  
ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον,  
Δεδαιδαλμένοι ψεύδεσι ποικίλοις,  
ἐξαπατῶντι μῦθοι.

PINDAR.

A New Edition, Revised and Enlarged.

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## PREFACE.

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I THINK it probable, that many of those by whom the theology advocated in the following pages will be cordially approved, may still incline to deem their publication, at this time, superfluous, on the ground that, in the present day, the interest of textuary controversy has very much passed away. They will allege, that the attention of the advanced and scholarly inquirers is now directed, not so much to the threadbare question of what doctrines the Scriptures teach, on which little new can be said, as to the more stirring one which regards the origin, inspiration and authority of the Scriptures themselves.

Admitting the truth of this statement, and hailing with entire approval the progress of critical inquiry in every branch, I yet conceive that it still is, and ever will be, a most desirable object, that just views should be

entertained as to what are the real doctrines of the New Testament. This is a point of simple justice toward that great religious movement, which has exercised so vast and beneficent an influence on human affairs. None can deny that Christianity has been a great fact, which in all its parts and bearings deserves to be thoroughly understood. But a consideration of more practical importance is this. So long as the Scriptures shall hold that high authority among us, as a standard of religious belief and duty, which they now do, and, I believe, will after all researches continue to do, it will depend on their being well or ill understood, whether they will tend to diffuse religious truth or religious error.

No doubt, so cardinal and catholic a doctrine as that of the Divine Unity would not fail to approve itself to men of enlightened minds, even though it were manifest that the Scriptures contradicted it. But with the people at large it would not be so ; and nothing seems likely to rescue Christendom from a virtual polytheism, but a generally-spread conviction, that the teaching of the Bible plainly establishes the sole Deity of the Father.

For my own part, however, I think it right frankly to state, that the opinion maintained by many, that

spiritual manifestations transcending the ordinary course of nature are incapable of proof from human testimony, appears to me rash and unphilosophical ; and thus to prejudice the examination of the historical evidence in favour of such occurrences, I deem plainly unjust. And I further avow my belief, that, in the main, the events recorded in the Gospel history, including the signs and wonders, and the resurrection of Christ, have successfully passed through this ordeal, and are still entitled to credit as historical facts, and as divine attestations to the truth and importance of the Christian religion.

This little work, originally published in the year 1824, is now reprinted in a fourth and enlarged edition, from a belief that, amid many larger and more learned volumes on the same subject, there is yet room for a small one, of a simple and popular kind, like the present. It is hoped, that it will now be found considerably improved, by an entire revisal, a better arrangement, important additions, and a division into chapters. It is believed, that few important texts, bearing on the questions treated, will have been left unnoticed ; and for the sake of easy reference to these texts, an index of them all is subjoined.



An alteration in the title-page has substituted the words, "*strict and proper Monotheism of the Gospel*," for "*Unitarian Doctrine*." This has been done to avoid the appearance of engaging in defence of a point of extra-scriptural theology, and a dogma of a sect. The term *Unitarian* must of necessity be taken as antithetic to the term *Trinitarian*, and therefore will imply, not so properly the *unity* of God, as his *uni-personality*. I should be loth to descend into the arena of controversy, either in attack or defence of metaphysical subtleties, which appear to me both foreign to Christian teaching, and in themselves unprofitable. I defend a great scriptural doctrine, expressed in scriptural language, by shewing the unscripturality, as well as inherent incredibility, of certain other doctrines, which, so far as received, do, in effect, subvert it.

A question is at present agitated among Unitarian Christians, as to whether some change be not desirable in their denominational designation. I can conceive none which would better express their real principles, than that of *Free Catholicists*.

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# ONE GOD THE FATHER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ON THE UNITY OF GOD.

WHETHER the doctrine of the Unity of God be, or be not, of that pre-eminent importance which is generally ascribed to it, is a question which it does not concern my present purpose to discuss. I shall assume the affirmative ; taking it for granted, that this doctrine is rightly regarded as the primary and fundamental verity of all true religion. Indeed, even in this age of daring speculation, no one, so far as I know, among professed Christians, has been so bold and eccentric as to advocate any form of avowed polytheism. The Christian Church, in all ages and in all nations, in all its creeds, confessions and liturgies, and with uniform consent of all its fathers and theologians, has, in terms at least, maintained as a capital article of faith, that *there is but one God*, and that to worship him alone is the first point of religious duty. Even among

its many heresies, not a single one has been chargeable with openly denying this doctrine.

It may be asked then, whether it be not superfluous to write a book in defence of a doctrine which no one disputes. And certainly it would be so, were it not possible to confess a doctrine in terms, and yet, by maintaining at the same time another doctrine essentially at variance with its proper import, to reduce it to a nullity. Now there are many who think that this is precisely the treatment which the doctrine of the Divine Unity has received at the hands of the self-styled orthodox Christian Church. That Church professes, indeed, to believe in the Divine unity. But how? In a *unity in trinity*, and a *trinity in unity*. God is *both one and three*; one *substance*, three *persons*;—each person *perfect God*, and, as such, to be distinctly worshipped. And with this doctrine of the *Trinity* it associates that of the *deity of Jesus Christ*, as being in one person *both God and man*. And all this the Church affirms to be the doctrine of the Scripture.

Now with respect to this *tri-une* God, what many think is this:—that while the *unity of substance* is a vague and shadowy expression, which means very little, the *trinity of persons* is one that conveys a strong and well-defined idea, such as all readily apprehend, and such as, when practically applied in divine worship, and especially in connection with

the doctrine of the deity of Christ, amounts, in effect, to a *nominal monotheism*, but a *real polytheism*.

Very important, then, is the question which is next to be asked. Is this doctrine of the Trinity, and deity of Jesus Christ, really *that of the Gospel*? Is it the teaching of the New Testament? There are many who say, *We believe that it is not*; and it is the object of the following pages to offer convincing proof that they who say so *are in the right*: in other words, that the Gospel teaches, simply and purely, a *strict and proper monotheism*.

But in undertaking this task, I am well aware that the advocates of the primitive Christian doctrine of *One God the Father*, have little inducement to appear before the public in the present day, except such as arises from a sense of duty and a consciousness of integrity. Finding themselves in a very humble minority; borne down, on the one hand, by all that commands dignity and influence in the world, and encountering, on the other, the obduracy of religious prejudice, and the intolerance of religious zeal; answered oftener by revilings and anathemas than by arguments; treated, in short, as if what is at worst but an involuntary error of opinion, were a crime of the deepest dye;—the voice of nature, and the spirit of unobtrusive piety, would alike lead them to retire from the unavailing contest, and, breathing a secret prayer to Him whom

they desire to please, to say, with one of old, "*Thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God.*" Yet this might be to shrink from duty. For when what we believe to be truth, is evil spoken of; and especially when it is confounded with gross errors, from which it is, in reality, quite distinct;—then it is our duty no longer to *keep silence, but to speak*; and to offer, as the apostle directs, "*an apology for our faith, with mildness and respect.*"

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, declares, that *in the one God there are three divine persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.* Now it may well be doubted, whether this term, *person*, is a proper one to be applied to the Deity at all. For it can hardly be used without conveying an idea, that the intelligent Being to whom it is applied, exists under some sensible and definite form; that he has a circumscribed or local presence. But it is manifest that such a conception of God would be wholly unsuitable to his nature. *He is a Spirit*,—infinite, eternal, universal,—present equally always and everywhere. If he has any *personal* presence, we can see it only in the face of that natural creation of which he is the soul.

It is, however, to be observed, that in our authorized English Bible, the term *person* is applied to God *only in a single instance*, and that by an impropriety of translation. It is where, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Son is said to be an "*express*

*image of God's person.\** Here the original word, rendered *person*, in imitation of the Latin Church, is *hypostasis*. The meaning of this metaphysical term is *substance*, or *subsistence*, and it may probably be understood here as indicating the divine *mind* or *nature*; but to the ordinary sense of our word *person*, it bears no analogy whatever. We should, however, notice in passing, that here, in the only place where the term occurs as applied to God, the divine *hypostasis*, or *person*, is mentioned in the *singular*, and no countenance is given to the notion that there is more than one. Yet orthodoxy will have it that God has *three hypostases*!

But though in Scripture the term *person* is so little applied to God, there is abundant use made there of those other forms of speech which, in common language, serve instead of it. Now it is an undeniable fact, that in these, the Scriptures almost uniformly speak of the Deity in that manner which conveys the idea of *personal unity*. When the personal pronouns refer to God, they are used in the *singular number*. God speaks as *I*, he is addressed as *thou*, he is spoken of as *he*. If the Deity had comprised a plurality of persons, a contrary mode of expression, as *we*, *ye*, *they*, would have been more natural and proper. The common *names*, too, that are applied to the Deity, such as *God* and *Lord*, *Creator*, *Father*, being personal terms, and used in the singular, do naturally, according to the



usage of every language, convey the impression, that a *single person* only is spoken of. Wherever, save in orthodox Christendom, a plurality of divine personages have been the objects of worship, the style of that worship has been, *not to God*, but to the *Gods*.

Let it be remembered that our present question of necessity turns very much on the propriety of *language*. We may safely assume, that whatever truths the sacred writers intended to convey, they would have communicated in such language as was best adapted to express them. Had they therefore intended us to understand, that *several* divine persons were each of them God and Lord, they would have spoken of the *Gods* and the *Lords* who were to be worshipped. But now, in point of fact, the Scriptures, from beginning to end, without saying anything expressly about *persons* in the Godhead, whether one or more, do, by the constant tenor of their phraseology, inculcate the most strict and proper monotheism.

And let us appeal to common sense, and the very nature of the case. With what sense or propriety can any one say that there is but *one God*, when, at the same time, he attributes to *three different persons* every attribute which constitutes deity? What, in fact, do mankind mean by *gods*, but certain mighty invisible persons, or beings, whom they worship? Those, then, who worship several such invisible per-

sons or beings, are, *de facto*, *polytheists*, according to the common sense of all the world ; nor will their denial of this charge, or their verbal profession of monotheism, though ever so clear and strong, at all alter the case. At least, let those who deny that this is polytheism, explain what polytheism is. Yet the Trinitarian persists in contending that there are *three divine persons*, but *only one God* ; and he makes so important a distinction between these two apparently equivalent phrases,—*a divine person*, and *a God*,—that in it he places the vast gulf that divides the faith necessary to salvation from the most pernicious and damnable heresy.

To us, however, this appears to be a distinction without a difference,—a mere quibble about words. We are firmly persuaded that when the Scripture insists on the Divine unity as the key-stone of true religion, it addresses itself to the common sense, and uses the common language, of mankind ; and that it does not set about to inculcate an impalpable subtilty, or a tricky enigma, but a broad and plain doctrine, such as all may readily understand. Such a doctrine that of the Divine unity, in its obvious and proper sense, really is ; and it entirely forbids us to attribute the Divine nature and attributes to a plurality of possessors.

But there is yet more decisive proof of the strict monotheism of the Gospel, in the fact, that it not only teaches, in general terms, that there is but one

God, but also identifies that one God with the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and with him *exclusively*. Hear the holy word: "*This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*"\* Again, "*To us there is but one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*"† Again, "*There is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ.*"‡ These passages not only limit the divine dignity to the Father, but expressly recognize the fact, that Jesus Christ is a *distinct being, and not a partaker of it*. Language more explicit, or more expressly pertinent to the point in question, it is difficult to conceive: and nothing would be easier than to accumulate such testimonies to any extent. Indeed, to mention at the same time God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ as distinct from him, is the current phraseology of the New Testament. Such, for example, is the ordinary apostolic benediction: "*Grace be with you and peace, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"§

Equally explicit is the scriptural testimony to the all-important practical doctrine, that *God alone, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, is the *proper object of divine worship*. Jesus himself repulsed the tempter by quoting from the old law, as binding on himself, that command, "*Thou*

\* John xvii. 3.

† 1 Tim. ii. 5.

‡ 1 Cor. viii. 6.

§ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

*shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*"\* Of this God he was a devout worshipper all his life. To him he continually prayed, and taught his disciples to pray. Him he expressly acknowledged as *his own God*, in nearly his last words on earth: "*I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.*"† And herewith agree all his precepts: "*The hour cometh, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.*"‡ "*Pray to thy Father who seeth in secret.*"§ "*When ye pray, say, Our Father, who art in heaven.*"|| "*In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, I say to you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*"¶¶

Such were the precepts, and such the uniform practice, both of Jesus himself and of his apostles. In spite of one or two apparent, but only apparent, exceptions to this statement, which will be explained hereafter, we may confidently assert, that there is not a single plain scriptural authority, be it precept or example, to sanction our addressing divine worship to any other name than that of our heavenly Father. This is that worship of which, and which alone, we may well and truly say, "*that it was in*

\* Matt. iii. 11.

† John xx. 17.

‡ John iv. 23.

§ Matt. vi. 6.

|| Luke xi. 2.

¶¶ John xvi. 23.

*the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end."*

It is indeed astonishing that deity, and co-equality with the Father, should so perseveringly be claimed for our Lord Jesus Christ, in face of his own most explicit and unequivocal acknowledgments, both of his inferiority to him and absolute dependence on him in all things, even as on his God. Jesus said, "*Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, that is God.*"\* "*My Father is greater than I.*"† "*I live by the Father. He hath given to the Son to have life in himself.*"‡ "*I can of my own self do nothing.*"§ "*The words which I speak to you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*"|| "*Of that day and hour knoweth no one; no, not the Son, but my Father only.*"¶ "*Ye seek to kill me, a MAN who have told you the truth which I have heard from God.*"\*\* "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*"†† "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*"‡‡

Now such testimonies might easily be multiplied, but that is unnecessary. I appeal to every candid mind, whether such expressions as these are, or can be, the language of the Supreme Being, the God of the universe? Could any language be

\* Mark x. 18.

† John x. 29.

‡ John vi. 57.

§ John v. 30.

|| John xiv. 10.

¶ Mark xiii. 32.

\*\* John viii. 40.

†† Luke xxii. 42.

‡‡ Matt. xxvii. 46.

devised better calculated to express the subordinate and limited condition of a created being, or the pious humility of a devout worshipper of the Most High?

It has been said, however, that in all language of this kind, Christ is to be understood as speaking with reference to his *assumed human nature* only, and exclusively of his divine nature. This is indeed a curious distinction. In reply to it, it might be sufficient to observe, that it is *quite gratuitous*. Christ never explained his own words in this way: he never even *hinted* such a qualification of them. There is nothing in the language of Christ's assertions to suggest to us that they are true only in the limited and peculiar sense which is here proposed. They are made absolutely, and if they are not true absolutely, I know not what can be said of them; but that they are absolutely false. In short, they cannot be explained in this way without the greatest violence, and palpable wresting of their natural and proper meaning. If it be permitted to qualify the sense of passages by insertion of limiting clauses which they neither express nor imply, there is an end of all certainty in language. Nothing can be said which may not in this way be unsaid or perverted. Let us, for instance, suppose it asserted, that Christ *never died*, never was crucified, never was buried, never rose again. Who would not admit that such assertions were false, and not fit to be uttered? Yet by insertion of the same sort

of saving clause which is so glibly used in defence of orthodoxy, they might easily be justified. These things, it might be said, are spoken of Christ, in reference to his *divine nature only*: he *never died in his divine capacity*: and certainly, with that limitation, they might be spoken truly enough. But it is evident, that unless this qualification be expressed, they are false: not more false, however, than would be that other unqualified assertion, which Christ really made, "*Of that day and that hour knoweth no one; no, not the Son; but the Father only*;"\* if at the same time, possessing the omniscience of Deity, he himself knew them perfectly well. Declarations made with such mental reservations are nothing but equivocation and deceit: and hence we ought to take heed lest, in defending an imagined orthodoxy, we should attach to Christ, our Master, the character of a delusive and disingenuous teacher.

But beside the objection to such limitations arising from their gratuitous and unwarranted character, there is often a still stronger one, arising from an incongruity between them and the context into which it is proposed to insert them. When, for example, Jesus says, "*Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but my Father only*,"† he applies to himself the highest title which belongs to him, that which, according to the orthodox, is the very style of his

\* *Mark xiii. 32.*

† *Ibid.*

deity, that of *the Son*; and the climax shews that he meant to do so. Now if he had qualified the expression, saying, "*nor the Son, in his human capacity,*"—which they tell us is what he meant,—would it not have been a most superfluous truism, a most weak and beggarly dilution of the whole significance of the passage?

I might make a similar comment on those words of Paul: "*When all things shall be put under him, then shall the Son himself be made subject to Him that did put all things under him; that God may be all in all.*"\* It is also very remarkable that when, in the visions of the Apocalypse, Jesus is represented as speaking from his most exalted heavenly state, he still uses the same style which he did on earth: "*Him that overcometh I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and I will write on him the name of my God.*"† He still acknowledges the Father as *his God*.

All these reflections lead, as it appears to me, to one obvious conclusion, in which we may safely rest, namely this: that when Jesus, without limitation or qualification, calls the Father *his God*, and acknowledges his own subordinate and dependent relations to him as such, we ought to take him at his word, in its plain and natural sense; and in so doing, leave the doctrine of the Divine Unity alone, in the clear light of its own simplicity.

\* 1 Cor. xv. 28.

† Apoc. iii. 12.



## CHAPTER II.

## GOD IN THE MAN CHRIST JESUS.

THOUGH, as we have seen, the Scripture makes a clear distinction between the one true God, our Father in heaven, and the "*man Christ Jesus*," whom he sent, yet it is no less true that God is represented as having been in and with Jesus in a very wonderful and peculiar manner. Of this the whole of the Gospel history is a witness to us. Nicodemus with reason confessed, "*Thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these signs which thou doest, unless God be with him.*"\* And it is elsewhere written, "*He was a man approved of God among us, by signs and wonders, which God did by him in the midst of us.*"† He healed the sick and raised the dead by his word ; he walked on the waters, and stilled the raging waves and wind ; he fed the multitudes with a morsel of bread ; he plainly read the thoughts of all hearts, and knew what was in man. On the mountain, with his disciples, he was suddenly transfigured ; his face shone as the sun, and his raiment became bright as the light ; the mighty dead, Moses and Elijah, appeared talking with him ; "*and there came a voice from heaven, saying, This*

\* John iii. 2.

† Acts ii. 22.

*is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* His preaching was with transcendent wisdom and power, so that even his adversaries confessed, "*No man ever spake like this man.*" And when at length their malice had compassed his death and nailed him to the cross, there was still a wondrous dignity in his behaviour. The crucified malefactor, who hung with him, was converted, and said, "*Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom;*" the Roman centurion exclaimed, "*Truly this was the Son of God.*" And after his burial, he rose from the grave, and re-visited his disciples, and talked and ate with them, and was seen of many. At length he ascended up, in their presence, and a cloud received him out of their sight.

Such was Jesus, as the sacred history records him,—a prophet plainly mighty in word and deed, above all that had been before him; a man who seemed in a singular manner to live and walk with God, and enjoy the presence of his Spirit; who was also most holy, gracious and beneficent in his whole character; and who became, through his word and example, the author of the greatest religious and moral revolution which the world has known.

Now we may repeat that question which was asked of old, "*Whence had this man this wisdom and these mighty works?*" And we may take the answer from his own mouth: "*He that hath seen*

*me, hath seen the Father. The word that ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me; and the Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. I can of mine own self do nothing. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me. As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and he hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man.\**

Now we here see very plainly in what manner it was that *God was in Christ*. It was in the word of wisdom, power and life; in the spirit of holiness, truth and love; and in a wonderful nearness and communion with himself. It was thus that Jesus was filled with a divine energy, and enabled to effect the great work of human redemption, to reconcile the world to God. And surely the account here given us of this great transaction, is as clear and simple as words can make it. What parties, so to speak, do we find here present? Plainly only God the Father, acting through his word and spirit; and Jesus, the pious, loving, suffering Son of Man, but withal the beloved of the Father, and through him the mighty Saviour, the Prince of life, and Founder of the everlasting age,—the world beyond the grave.

And here it is important that we should observe, that however close and intimate was the union be-

\* John xiv. 9, &c.

tween Jesus and the Father, it was yet such as not in any degree to confound them together, by merging or obscuring the distinct personality belonging to Christ's humanity. That his human nature remained throughout entire and perfect, retaining its own distinct consciousness and will, its natural affections, liability to suffering and temptation, and limited knowledge, has ever been the generally received and reputedly orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church. Only the short-lived heresy of the Monothelites, condemned by the sixth general council, maintained the identity, or oneness, of the Divine and human wills in his person. But his own language was explicit: "*Not my will, but thine, be done.*" And though he said, "*I and my Father are one,*"\* the original words—*ἐν εσμεν*, not *εἷς εσμεν*—import *one thing*, not *one person*. It is, in fact, only the same unity as that which he acknowledges between himself and his disciples: "*The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one—ἵνα ὡσιν ἐν, καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν εσμεν. I in them, and thou in me; that they all may be made perfect in one, and the world may know that thou hast sent me.*"† Behold, then, in what sense God was in Christ, and in what sense Jesus was one with God.

Thus we see that the union of the Deity with humanity in the person of Jesus, was of a very dif-

\* John x. 30.

† John xvii. 22, 23.

ferent kind from that which is commonly set forth in the creeds and formularies of reputed orthodoxy. There was nothing in it that could properly be called an *assumption by God of human nature*, or "*taking the manhood into God*," or *God becoming man*, so as to form a *God-man*, or anything of that kind. In the Gospel history, the man Jesus always appears as distinct, personally, from God his Father, as any one man is from any other man.

And from this most evident fact, two very important consequences flow. The first is this: that in uniting himself with the man Jesus, God did not take into himself a *second personality*. We have seen before that no plurality of persons is ascribed by Scripture to the *Divine nature*. Still, if it were true that God had taken on himself the human nature, to which a proper personality belongs, it might be inferred that, in virtue of this assumption, he had become at least *bi-personal*. But now we see that this idea is without foundation, and any such inference therefore falls to the ground.

And the second consequence from the fact of the personal distinctness between Jesus and the Father, is this: that their union does not at all make him a partaker of the Father's Godhead, so that in virtue of it, it could properly be said that he is himself God. And this is the more evident, because the union between Christ and his Father is said by him to have been the same in kind with that between

himself and his apostles ; and it would therefore follow, that if this union communicated the deity of the Father to Christ, it would also have communicated the same, through Christ, to his disciples. In short, it is plain that phraseology of this kind ought not to be strained to an extreme sense.

And hence we may also see, in what sense it is said by John, that the divine "*Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.*"\* This, no doubt, implies a certain union between God and man in the person of Jesus. Yet not such, assuredly, but that the human person of Jesus, and the divine person or being of God, remained always perfectly distinct.

In fact, the notion of two natures so essentially different as the human and divine, subsisting together in one and the same individual person, so as to impart to that person all the attributes of both, and that without the least diminution or alteration, appears to involve nothing less than actual contradiction. For how can the same being at once know all things, and yet be ignorant of many ; be incapable of temptation, and yet be tempted ; in short, be infinite in all things, and yet in all things finite ? To say that the Supreme Being assumed the human nature or became a man, appears as much as to say, that he so changed himself as to become subject to ignorance, temptation, suffering and death ; or that

\* John i. 14.

the Eternal resigned for a season the conduct of the universe, to shrink into the limited person of man, and be engrossed in the narrow sphere of this minute world. But though God be almighty, we dare not suppose that this implies a power of altering his own nature, or divesting himself of his essential attributes ; for in so doing he would cease to be God. Indeed, the doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacramental elements, does not appear more inconceivable than that of the real deity of one who was confessedly a man. Such doctrines no pretence of revelation can prove ; because they must, of necessity, disprove the authority of any pretended revelation that should contain them. For so long as any doctrine appears to us absurd, we can never be warranted in receiving it as the word of God.

It may even be a question whether the Jews would have been warranted in receiving Jesus as God, even by all the signs which he wrought before their eyes. For if, acknowledging, as he did, his distinctness from the Father who sent him, and whom he declared to them to be the same with Jehovah their God, he yet made himself to be God also, and demanded their worship accordingly,—in so doing he would have appeared to realize a case supposed by their law, and to have justified the ill-treatment which he received from them, his miracles notwithstanding. For thus it is written : “ *If*

*there arise among you a prophet, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake to thee, saying, Let us go after other gods which thou hast not known : thou shalt not hearken to that prophet ; that prophet shall surely be put to death.”\**

Indeed, in the apprehension of the Jews, the case here supposed had actually occurred. Jesus had said to them, “*I and my Father are one. Then they took up stones to stone him. And Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewn you from my Father ; for which of those works do ye stone me ? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God. But Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods ? If it called them gods to whom the word of God came, say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God ?*”† Now the point which we have to observe here, and which I think every candid mind must concede, is this, that Jesus *did not admit* the charge which had been made against him, of “*making himself God :*” on the contrary, he in effect denied it. It was as if he had said, “*If I had made myself God, there was a sense in which the Scripture would have warranted me in doing so ; that is, as one to whom the word of God has*

\* Deut. xiii. 1.

† John viii. 29.



come. But, in truth, I have not done so ; I have only said, that *I am the Son of God*,—that is, the Messiah.” This passage appears to me most instructive and important, because it clearly vindicates the character of our holy Lord from that charge of arrogance and presumption, not to say blasphemy, to which any mortal man who should pretend to be God would be justly liable. Yet notwithstanding this his disclaimer of it, those who most boast themselves his friends, persist in fixing it upon him !

It has with many been a favourite argument for the deity of Christ, that none but one in whose person the divine and human natures were united, could properly sustain the character of the *Mediator* ; that none but a *God-man* could accomplish the great work of human redemption. On such a question as this, much subtle argument might be spent with little result. It will be more to the purpose to observe the undeniable fact, that the Scriptures expressly speak of all the *great offices of Christ* as having been discharged by him *simply in his human capacity*. This is a sort of argument whose weight will, I think, be felt by all.

In the first place, then, it is stated, in general, that “*the Mediator between God and man is the MAN Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.*”\* This *man*, therefore, was also our Redeemer

\* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

and Saviour. And so we read: "*Of this man's seed hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.*"\* This very name, Jesus, implied that he would *save his people from their sins*. Again, it was the man Jesus, who was the great prophet promised by Moses in these words: "*A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you, of your brethren, like unto me: unto him shall ye hearken, according to all which thou desiredst of the Lord thy God, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God.*"† This prediction the apostles apply expressly to Christ.

The priestly office is also represented as sustained by Christ in a human capacity. On this point the writer to the Hebrews, by whom this topic is most fully handled, insists most explicitly: "*He succoureth not angels, but he succoureth the seed of Abraham. Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able also to help them that are tempted.*"‡ And again: "*He that sanctifieth, i. e. Christ, and they that are sanctified, are all of one; i. e. of one origin or parentage; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.*"§ Here and elsewhere, the Messiah, in

\* Acts xiii. 23.

† Deut. xviii. 15; Acts vii. 37.

‡ Hebrews ii. 16.

§ Hebrews ii. 11.

his priestly character, is evidently considered as a human being; nor is there the slightest allusion to his possessing any other nature.

But the favourite character in which the Jews anticipated their Messiah, was that of a *King*. They fondly expected the time when the long-promised Son of David should come to deliver them from all their enemies, and reign over them in peace and splendour. These hopes were in harmony with the prophetic strains; and ages afterward, when at length the Christ was about to enter the world, an angel declared, that God would give him the throne of *his father David*. This throne, then, he inherited as the *son of David*; and if as the son of David, then *as a man*.

The New Testament, less concerned with national affairs, varies the style without change of meaning, and calls the man Jesus the *head of his church*, and the *Lord of his people*. "*He is the head of the body, the Church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead.*"\* "*For to this end Christ both died and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.*"† Now all this belongs to human nature.

Moreover, it is the man Jesus *who is the resurrection and the life*;‡ "*for as by man came death, by man cometh also the resurrection of the dead.*"§ It is also "*by that man whom he hath ordained,*

\* Coloss. i. 18.

† Romans xiv. 9.

‡ John xi. 25.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 21.

*that God will judge the world.*"\* It is "*the Son of Man who will come in his glory, and gather all nations before him.*"† Finally, was it not "*a Son of Man that was brought to the Ancient of Days, to whom were given dominion and glory, that all people, nations and languages should serve him, whose dominion was to be an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom one that should not be destroyed*"?‡

Since, then, the Scripture represents the Lord Jesus as sustaining all these his great offices *simply as a man*,—by the Divine grace and assistance, indeed, but without the slightest allusion to his possession of another nature,—does there not arise a presumption of no mean force against the hypothesis of such a second nature? Is it not rendered gratuitous and improbable?

In short, it appears to me, that the doctrine which ascribes proper and absolute deity to a human being, however holy and venerable and divinely gifted he may have been, is encumbered with such stupendous difficulties, and is essentially so inconceivable and irrational, as well as contrary to the general tenor of the Holy Word, that nothing but the most explicit, unequivocal and repeated assertions of it in Scripture, would justify us in assuming it to be taught there. And I must add, that though we were constrained to admit that it was taught there, still even that would not, in my judg-

\* Acts xvii. 31.

† Matt. xxv. 31.

‡ Daniel vii. 13.

ment, justify us either in receiving it as the word of God, or in believing it to be true. It would rather raise a suspicion, that the portion of Scripture which contained such doctrine, was not the genuine word of God, but a comment of human fallibility.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### ALLEGED ATTRIBUTES OF CHRIST.

It ought frankly to be admitted, that there are many passages of Holy Writ which speak of our Lord Jesus Christ in very lofty and mysterious terms, and such as, at first sight, might well create an impression, that he was either really God, or at least some great superangelic being, who existed in heaven before he appeared as a man upon earth. Of the chief of these passages I shall presently make it my business to offer some explanation; but before doing so, I will make one or two remarks which apply to them in general.

It is with many a favourite argument for the deity of Christ, that they find, as they think, divine works and attributes ascribed to him. Now certainly if the premisses here were true, the inference drawn from them would be undeniable; for it must

be allowed on all hands, that the essential perfections of the Deity are incommunicable to any inferior nature. But is it true that the Divine attributes are really in Scripture ascribed to Christ? Let us examine this matter strictly.

I think it will be found that whatever great or seemingly divine things are anywhere ascribed to Christ, it will also and often, at the same time, be stated or implied, that they belong to him only *through the gift, will or power of God, his Father*. Now if this be really so, it will surely be evident to every reflecting mind, that the argument for his proper deity with which we are dealing, drops entirely to the ground. Attributes which are enjoyed by another's gift and another's will, works which are done by another's power, are no proofs of Deity, except in him from whom they originally proceed. They are but rays of the glory of God, reflected from one to whom he imparts them. In many other places in which great things are said of Christ, it will appear, on comparing the passages with others, either that some limitation of their force is suggested, or that the same terms are applied to other persons beside Christ. It is by thus comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and interpreting Scripture by Scripture, that we shall take the surest way to ascertain the truth.

Let us now take a few examples. Some contend that the divine *omnipotence* is claimed by Jesus in

saying, "*All power, or authority, is given to me in heaven and in earth.*"\* But is it not plain, on the very face of this passage, that the power here spoken of is not a divine attribute in Jesus, inasmuch as it is said to have been *given* to him? What we believe Christ to have here intended, was that supreme spiritual authority which he had received from God as the appointed head of the Church, and judge of the living and the dead.

Again, it is attempted to prove *omniscience* in Christ from the words addressed to him by Peter: "*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*"† But the use of such phrases as *all things* is lax, and they will not bear to be strained to the letter; they must be interpreted by the matter in hand. The Epistle of John speaks in like manner of Christians in general: "*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*" Christ also himself plainly disclaims omniscience, when he says, "*Of that day and hour knoweth no one; no, not the Son, but my Father only.*"‡ And the book of the Apocalypse is entitled, "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to shew to his servants the things to come.*"

Once more: *omnipresence* is supposed to be ascribed to Christ from his saying, "*Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world,*" or age.§ And

\* Matt. xxviii. 18.

† John xxi. 17.

‡ Mark xiii. 32.

§ Matt. xxviii. 20.

again: "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*"\* The context shews that these predictions related especially to that superhuman power and inspiration which Christ promised to his apostles, and in general to his spiritual superintendence of the church after his departure, which is generally allowed. But this does not imply the omnipresence of Deity. This whole globe is but a speck in the universe; the whole church is but one little family of the rational creation; and that many spirits, below the Supreme, are frequently present among us, is very largely believed. The glorified *Man of the Resurrection*, without being God, may yet be such a being as we but ill conceive. Even Paul, on earth, could speak to a distant church in this wise: "*When ye are gathered together with my spirit.*"†

These examples may enable us to judge, with what justice it is asserted, that Jesus is proved to be God by the possession of the divine attributes. They will shew that he enjoyed only a *partial communication of those attributes, for the special purposes of his mission*, such as God might well impart and man receive. But even were the expressions of Scripture stronger than they are, there is a passage of Paul which instructs us very plainly in what sense we ought to receive them: "*When it is said that all things are put under Christ, it is mani-*

\* Matt. xviii. 20.

† 1 Cor. v. 4.



*fest that it is with exception of him that did put all things under him," i.e. God.\** Which implies thus much in general: that however great things may anywhere be said of Christ, or of any other person, still "*it is manifest,*" it is a *matter of course*, that nothing is to be understood that would infringe on the essential and unrivalled glory of the Supreme Being. The caution here suggested by the apostle appears to me very important, and highly proper to be borne in mind through the whole investigation of the present subject. In offering it, the sacred writer seems almost to betray a presentiment of that rash perversion of Scripture, by which, in after days, the sole Deity of the Eternal Father has been so much obscured.

Many, even among those who have not claimed for Christ supreme deity, have yet maintained it to be a scriptural doctrine, that he was the *immediate Creator of the natural universe*. They do not seem to consider that the work of creation is of the very essence of the Deity, the primary manifestation of that divine energy which was in him *from of old, from everlasting*. It is also the foundation of his sovereignty, the rational ground of his claim to our worship and homage; even as the Psalmist sings: "*Know ye that the Lord he is God. It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves: we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.*"† And grandly

\* 1 Cor. xv. 27.

† Psalm i. 50.

the prophet exclaims, "*The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.*"\* To maintain, therefore, that Christ made the world, is all one with maintaining that he is the one Supreme God; and nothing appears more inconsistent both with Scripture and right reason, than to maintain the one of these things without the other. In fact, the notion of a subordinate Creator has been the first and chief source of theological corruption.

Such, however, was the doctrine of the ancient *Arians*, and the same opinion has been entertained by many notable men even to this day. The most prominent text on which this opinion is grounded, is one in the Epistle to the Colossians. It is there said of Christ, that he is "*the image of the invisible God, the first-born of the whole creation: for in him were all things created, those in the heavens and those on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers: all have been created through him and for him.*"† Now we may understand this to be said either of the natural or material creation, or of the *spiritual* or *new creation*; that is, the kingdom of God, founded and ordered by Christ, both in heaven and earth. To many it has appeared that the part of the passage which states, not that the things which Christ created were natural objects,

\* Jeremiah x. 11.

† Coloss. i. 15.

such as the earth and sea, but that they were *thrones, dominions, principalities and powers*, much favours the opinion that this creation was spiritual. This interpretation has also received the sanction of many eminent scholars, and it is much confirmed by the fact that the words, to *create* and *creation*, are often used in a very kindred sense in other parts of the New Testament. Thus in the Apocalypse, Christ is called "*the beginning of the creation of God.*"\* By Paul the gospel is called "*the economy of the mystery that was hidden from the ages in God, who hath created all things.*"† Again he says, that "*we have been created in Christ Jesus unto good works.*"‡ And again, that he hath "*created in himself both (i.e. Jews and heathen) into one new man.*"§ Peter also says, "*Submit yourselves to every human creation, whether to the king,*" &c.|| From these instances it may be seen how freely in the New Testament this phrase of *creating* is applied to spiritual things.

That such is really its application in the passage to the Colossians now before us, is confirmed by what follows in the immediate context: "*For in him God hath been pleased to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace by the blood of his cross, whether the things on earth, or the things in*

\* Apoc. iii. 14, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ.

† Ephes. iii. 9.

‡ Ephes. ii. 10.

§ Ephes. ii. 15.

|| 1 Pet. ii. 13, πᾶσι ἀνθρώποις κτίσται.

*the heavens.*" Here and elsewhere, it should be remembered, that Paul has confessedly some things which are *hard to be understood*. There are peculiarities in his phraseology, with which only some pains and study can render us familiar.

There is one other passage, in which the doctrine, that Christ made the world, would appear at first sight to be taught very positively and concisely. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read : "*In these last days God hath spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he hath made the worlds.*"\* I shall consider the whole of this context more fully in another place. At present I will only state in brief, that the words, *τοὺς αἰῶνας*, here rendered *the worlds*, mean properly and literally *the ages* ; and that the sense in which they are here used appears to be indicated in a phrase which occurs a few verses later, namely, the "*world to come, whereof we are speaking.*" They express, as I understand them, the writer's belief, that it was by the agency of Jesus, through and after his resurrection, that God had *founded the future age*, or *state*, his kingdom in the church above.

Another prominent passage, frequently adduced to prove the pre-existence and deity of Christ, is one which occurs in the Epistle to the Philippians, and which in our common version runs thus : "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus* ;

\* Hebrews i. 2.

*who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.\** But it is to be observed here, that the original words of the latter clause, οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ᾗγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, should, in accordance with Hellenic idiom, rather be rendered, “*thought it not a thing to be seized, or caught at, to be as God.*” Our present rendering is every way repulsive and improbable. The supposition that these words teach Christ’s deity, is disproved by what follows: “*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him the name that is above every name.*” This might be said of a man, but not of God. On the whole, the entire passage may well be understood in relation to the lowly and suffering condition of Christ’s human life, contrasted with the great dignity and wonderful powers which God had really bestowed on him, and which are expressed by saying, that he was “*in the form of God.* Yet he did not deem it a thing to be caught at, or eagerly seized, to be as God; but lowered himself, having taken the form of a servant, having become in the likeness of men, and been found in fashion, or behaviour, as a man. He humbled himself, having been obedient even so far as death, and the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him the name that is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and on the earth, and under the

\* Philip. ii. 5.

*earth ; and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, unto the glory of God the Father ;*”—that is, as I understand it, that the whole human race, both in this world and the other, should everywhere worship God in the name of Christ. And surely it is more reasonable to interpret a passage which, like this, is somewhat ambiguous and obscure, by reference to known facts, if that can be done, than to take it as an assertion of other facts, of whose reality there is no sufficient evidence.

And this argument is the more powerful, if those other alleged facts do themselves appear highly improbable or even incredible, as is surely the case here. The hypothesis of Christ's being a great celestial spirit who had assumed a human person, is fraught with stupendous difficulties, beside being, on the very face of it, utterly irreconcilable with his real and proper humanity. Under what category a compound being so constituted would fall, it would be hard to say ; but at least it is certain, that he could not properly, in unqualified terms, be called *a man*.

Before quitting this subject, it will be proper to notice certain passages in the Gospel of John, which are commonly, and not without some show of reason, regarded as proofs of *Christ's personal pre-existence*.

The principal one of these passages is found in the sixth chapter, and the situation which led our

Lord to use the words which he did will also help to explain them. The Jews said to Jesus, "*What sign shewest thou that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said to them, It is not Moses that hath given you the bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world. Then said they to him, Lord, ever give us this bread. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He that eateth me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me shall never thirst. All that the Father giveth me will come to me, and him that cometh to me I will not reject. For I am come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.*"\*

Now the question here is, whether in using the words, "*I am come down from heaven,*" Jesus spoke of a *personal pre-existence* in the unseen world before his birth on earth, or of the *divine origin of his mission, doctrine and spiritual powers*; in other words, did he use this language in a literal, or in a spiritual sense? I will ask one question. When we read of the manna, that *God gave them bread from heaven to eat*, do we feel obliged to suppose that the manna pre-existed in heaven? Surely not.

\* John vi. 31.

But why are we any more obliged to suppose this of Christ, because he transfers to himself the same expression? And if we are not obliged to do it, why should we do it? Why should we charge the passage with a new and strange doctrine, when it admits of an easy explanation in accordance with known truth? For my own part, I certainly believe, that when the Lord here says, "*I am come down from heaven,*" he means no more than when he says elsewhere, "*I am sent from God.*" And that no pre-existence is implied in that, is evident, because he says the same of his disciples: "*As thou hast sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world.*"\*

Some allowance, too, must be made for the peculiar style of this evangelist. That style is prevalently not literal, but spiritual, mystical, in some degree hyperbolical. In this very connection he makes the Lord say, "*Unless ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in you.*"† There were times, too, when Jesus purposely veiled his meaning in parable and enigma, because of the captious and unbelieving spirit of his hearers—"that hearing they might hear and not understand, and seeing they might see and not perceive."

There are one or two other passages to which the same remarks will more or less apply, and which shall be briefly noticed. The Baptist said of Jesus, "*After me cometh a man who is preferred before*

\* John xvii. 18.

† John vi. 53.



*me, for before me he was;\** that is, as it has, I think, been very properly explained, *he was my superior, or my leader.* This passage, in fact, seems to be only another version of what is expressed in the other Gospels thus: "*He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry.*"†

We find also this passage: "*Now, O Father, glorify thou me with thyself (παρὰ σεαυτῷ), with the glory which I had before the world was with thee.*"‡ Certainly if we knew from other evidence that Christ had been with God in a pre-existent state, it would be natural to suppose that he here referred to that state. But if that is not the case, it seems more reasonable to explain the phrase, "*the glory which I had with thee*" (παρὰ σοί), as referring to the divine *pre-ordination*, or *good pleasure*, or *esteem*.§ We find this preposition used in that sense not unfrequently; as, for instance, in the words, "*Be not wise with yourselves*" (παρ' ἑαυτοῖς), or, as it is rendered, "*in your own conceit*;" or in those, "*How shall man be just with God?*"

The last passage here requiring notice is this: "*Before Abraham was, I am.*"|| Such is the common rendering of the original words, *πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι, ἐγὼ εἰμι.* But every one acquainted with Greek idiom must know, that the phrase, *I am,*

\* John i. 30.

† Matt. iii. 11.

‡ John xvii. 5.

§ Claritate quam habui apud te prædestinatione tuâ.—Augustine.

// John viii. 58.

is not a fair equivalent for *εγώ ειμι*, as here used. It is commonly supposed, that in speaking thus Christ alluded to the words of God to Moses, "*I am that I am*;" and again, "*I am hath sent me unto you*;"\* in effect assuming to himself the Divine name. But if we turn to the Greek version of this passage in the Septuagint,—the version to which the New Testament writers almost always refer,—we shall see that it gives no countenance to this notion. It is this: *Εγώ ειμι ὁ ὢν. Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέ με πρὸς ὑμᾶς*—"*I am he that is. He that is hath sent me to you.*"

This divine name, therefore, as rendered into Greek, is not *εγώ ειμι*, *I am*, but *Ὁ ὢν*, *he that is*. And as these words are no proof of Christ's deity, no more are they of his pre-existence. The proper rendering of *εγώ ειμι* here, as in all other places where the phrase stands thus alone, is, *I am he*, or *It is I*, or *It was I*; as when Jesus said to his disciples, "*It is I; be not afraid.*" So here it should be rendered, "*Before Abraham was, I am he*;" or, "*Before Abraham was, it was I.*" The use of the phrase is elliptical, referring backward to the person or thing most prominently in question just before. The paraphrase here, as I think, would be to this effect: *It was I who, before Abraham was born, was the promised seed, the destined object of his faith and hope, whose day he foresaw, and was glad.*

\* Exod. iii. 14.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ON THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

It is a point of church orthodoxy, that the *Holy Spirit* is a *divine person*, distinct both from the Father and the Son, and as such to be distinctly worshipped. As this doctrine, like that of the deity of Christ, impairs that of the strict and proper unity of God, it now demands our consideration.

The proper and primary meaning of the word *spirit* is *breath*, as is also that of the Greek word *pneuma*, which it represents. And because breathing is so necessary to life, as in our ideas to be almost identified with it, it has come to pass, that the meaning of the word *spirit* has been extended from the outward material phenomenon to the inward living principle by which it is produced, and of whose presence it is a token. And especially by a man's spirit we understand that conscious part of his living being which perceives, and thinks, and wills—that, in short, which is most emphatically himself.

Now as all our conceptions of the Divine Being are obliged to be cast in the mould of our humanity, we have no other possible way either of thinking or speaking of him, than as we think and speak of ourselves ; and unless we be content to avail our-

selves of this imperfect expedient, we must cease to think and speak of him at all. As, therefore, we ascribe to God a nature possessing intelligence and will, combined with active power, analogous to our own, only infinitely more exalted, it follows naturally and reasonably, that we should think and speak of him also as having a *spirit*; indeed, we cannot well do otherwise. But in regard to God, we press the use of this term somewhat farther than we do in regard to ourselves. For inasmuch as he is manifested, not in a visible *person*, as we are, but only as an invisible *power*, we say of him, what we do not say of ourselves, that he *is* a Spirit. And this expresses our highest and justest conception both of his being and of the worship which we owe him; even as it is written, "*God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*"\*

Now the Scriptures, in sundry places and in diverse manners, say a great deal about the Spirit of God. In the first place, they speak of the Spirit of God as being one and the same with God himself; even as the spirit of a man is one and the same with the man himself. Such is the language of Paul: "*For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so, the things of God knoweth no one*

\* John iv. 24.

*but the Spirit of God.*"\* Hence we may see how improper and unscriptural a thing it is to make a distinction between God and his Spirit, as if they were two different beings, or two different persons, or two distinct objects of worship. Holy Scripture neither anywhere uses any such phrases as these, nor affords any example of such worship. Not a single instance can be found either of prayer or praise addressed to the Holy Spirit in all the Bible, nor any precept to authorize it.

Is not, then, self-styled orthodoxy very bold in this particular? Does it not appear to set up a *new God* quite of its own invention? What should we think of one who should assert, that a man and his own spirit were two distinct persons? Should we not say that he was quite confounding the meaning of words, and talking gross nonsense? And though God is not man, and all human language must needs fail to represent him as he is; yet when we do apply to him terms drawn from our own nature, we surely ought to do so in a manner consistent with reason and propriety. No truth, whether divine or human, can be justly represented by words which appear to our minds to convey only absurdity and contradiction.

The Spirit of God, then, as existing in the Divine nature, is just one and the same thing with God himself, even as is the spirit of a man with the

\* 1 Cor. ii. 10.

man himself; and so only can we rightly think of it. But in the Scripture, the holy spirit is spoken of, not only as existing in God, but often also as proceeding, or going forth, from him. It is spoken of as an *influence* or *agency* of his will, impressing itself effectively on his works, in all departments of nature, both material and spiritual.

Thus it is written, that in the beginning of creation, "*the spirit of God moved on the face of the waters.*" And again, that "*by his spirit he garnished the heavens.*" But vastly more abundant are the passages in which this term indicates God's influence on his creatures' minds. Even of our natural faculties it is said, that "*there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.*"\* For truly, as the spirit is that part in man which by its nature is nearest akin to the spirit of God, so would it also appear to be that on which the spirit of God exerts the most immediate and direct influences. Though our minds, like our bodies, are subject to natural laws, yet in regard to them these laws are not so easily traced and defined; and the boundaries between what is natural, and what is beyond nature, are not so obvious and distinct. These things even seem to blend together, and to melt insensibly into one another, even as the clear upper atmosphere seems to do into the circumambient ether. Hence it is,

\* Job xxxii. 8.

that with regard to our inmost being,—the state of our souls, our religious affections, our spiritual health and peace,—we feel ourselves in a nearer relation to our Maker than we do in other things,—nearer than we know how to define. We feel conscious of his presence ; our souls essay to commune with him ; they are drawn out toward him in supplication and adoration ; they seem assured that he knows and hears their petitions ; and they expect responses from his Fatherly love. All this belongs to our nature, yet is also the spirit of God within us.

But while we believe in the salutary influence of the spirit of God on the human mind, and that by this and through means of the word the heart is renewed in holiness, and the understanding enlightened with divine truth, we do not suppose that in the ordinary course of things this influence is extended to us otherwise than through the *intervention of natural causes*, either external to our minds, or within their constitution. We conceive that those causes receive the impressions of the Divine will, at a depth in things which is infinitely removed from our observation. They fulfil his designs with respect to every individual, and work together for the good of those who love him.

But in all this there needs be no deviation from the laws of nature and the established order of things, nor ought we, without special reason, to

expect any. God can fulfil the purposes of his grace toward us, as well in observing the laws of nature, as in interfering with them ; and we have reason to believe that it is, in general, his will to do so. The Deity presides, as it were, at the fountain-head of existence, from which the first streams of nature flow forth under his direction, involving, in embryo, all events. This pre-arrangement of all causes determines even our wills in their freest exercise, and that without the smallest infringement either on our free agency or our moral responsibility ; and all this in the midst of what seems to us, and really is, the most natural and regular course of events. It is by misconception of these undoubted truths, through confusion of thought, that men's minds become entangled in those irrational views of some points of theology which deserve the name of *Christian fatalism*. Keeping clear of these, it is our duty to labour to grow in grace, through the use of all the appointed means, and especially to seek the promised blessing of the spirit through earnest prayer, although present experience forbids us to expect the communication of it in a supernatural manner.



## CHAPTER V.

## OF REASON AND INSPIRATION.

THE consideration of the subject of the Spirit naturally leads us to that of the *inspiration of the Scriptures*. Strictly monotheistic Christians, in common with all others, regard the Scriptures as a divinely inspired guide of religious faith and practice. They acknowledge in them an authentic record of the religious teachings of certain holy men of old, who on account of their singular wisdom and sanctity, are reasonably believed to have been enlightened by an extraordinary influence of the spirit of God. They receive them, therefore, and especially those of the New Testament, as the catholic standard of religious doctrine in the churches, and as containing all things necessary to make men wise unto salvation.

At the same time, we do not carry our opinion of the inspiration of the Scriptures to the same length as many others do. We do not think it necessary to maintain that the sacred writings are, on any subject, so absolutely exempt from error, as to allow of no appeal from them to the lights which we derive from other sources, as history, criticism, science, and the general reason and experience of

mankind. On the contrary, we hold it quite right and proper, and no less than our duty, to avail ourselves, along with the Scriptures, of all these other lights, which truly flow from the same source, and all contribute to our knowledge of God.

It is therefore a principle with us, that the Scriptures *ought to be reasonably interpreted*. Doctrines from which reason revolts, ought not lightly to be assumed as the true sense of Scripture, because it is in the highest degree unlikely that they should be so, especially when they are contradictory to the plain teaching of Scripture itself in other places. The use of reason in matters of religion is by many indeed deprecated, as sinful and dangerous. But why should it be so? What harm has ever resulted from it? On the other hand, what terrible evils have sprung from the blind principle of implicit faith! Has not this been the stronghold of bigotry and persecution, with all their train of hateful and inhuman wrongs? Is it not plainly the principle of not bringing religious belief to the test of reason, which sustains all the monstrous superstitions which deform the earth, and afflict the human race? But the religion of reason is ever pure, moral and benevolent; and the history of the world may be challenged, to produce an instance in which the free and honest application of the understanding to religious subjects, has been the proper cause of abiding evil. We therefore believe that in calling

reason to our aid in explaining the Scriptures, we are referring them to their true and legitimate interpreter, and making the best possible use of the mental faculties which God has given us.

But it is said, that divine subjects lie above the reach of human reason, and therefore, that though the doctrine of the Trinity, or any other, may appear irrational, yet that is no just argument against it. In answer to this, it is necessary to draw a distinction between a thing's being *above* reason, and being *contrary* to reason. It is quite *above* reason, for example, to explain the manner of the Divine existence, or what is the nature of that underived and incommunicable being which God possesses from eternity to eternity. In like manner, it is above the power of reason to explain the nature of the human soul, or the manner of its union with the body. On these points our situation is one of simple ignorance; we know nothing about them, because they lie beyond the possibility of our investigation, or even of our conception. But it does not follow, that because there is much in the Divine Nature which we cannot understand, we are therefore to admit every proposition that may be made respecting it, with undistinguishing credulity. We are utterly ignorant of the substance of which the moon consists; but would that excuse us for believing that it is made of cheese or leather? No more does our ignorance of the Divine Nature jus-

tify us in believing doctrines concerning it, which are in themselves positively contradictory or absurd.

It is therefore very little to the purpose, that Trinitarians allege the incomprehensible nature of God, as if that were an answer to all objections against their own doctrine; for to the objection which is actually brought against that doctrine, it is in truth no answer at all. They require us to believe, that a certain holy and venerable man of whom we read in history, was not only a man, but at the same time the very and eternal God, and possessing every divine perfection. Now to say that the same individual being is at once perfect God and perfect man, is like saying that one individual animal is at once entirely white and entirely black,—a proposition which is plainly a contradiction in terms, and which, except in some quibbling, enigmatic sense, could not possibly be true.

Hence we may see likewise, how little to the purpose is that hackneyed illustration of this subject, attempted to be drawn from the union of the human soul and body. That a sentient principle should be combined with a material substance, in the manner which we experience, is a thing which, although we may not be able to explain the mode of its existence, is yet so far from appearing impossible or contradictory, that there is nothing in it which appears even difficult or improbable. Far different is it to assert the co-existence, in an indi-

vidual person, of the ignorance and infirmity of man with the perfections of Deity. And far different it is to ascribe all the divine attributes to three separate persons, and assert at the same time that there is but one God. This is either contradiction or equivocation; in either case it is a breach of truth and a gross abuse of language. But in the union of our souls and bodies, there is no such thing. There is merely a profound and obscure physical fact, lying beyond our powers of investigation.

Many things relating to God are indeed infinitely above the reach of our feeble understandings. Who is so senseless as not to acknowledge this with deep humility? But it is not above reason, but perfectly competent to reason, to see that the conditions of man and the perfections ascribed to God, being the very reverse of each other, are totally incompatible, and cannot therefore subsist together in the same person. The essential incompatibility, for example, of human ignorance and divine omniscience in the same being, we have already noticed. We may take another instance in the *temptations* of Jesus. It is written that he was "*in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*"\* But of God it is written that "*he cannot be tempted.*"† Therefore, if Jesus was God, the same individual being was at once incapable of temptation, and yet tempted like as we

\* Hebrews iv. 15.

† James i. 13.

are. This is a contradiction ; and it is not lessened by saying, that he was tempted in one nature, while he was incapable of temptation in another ; for if the Divine Being is essentially incapable of temptation, he cannot assume a nature in which he can be tempted. And it is obvious otherwise, that to one possessing at the very moment the glorious consciousness of Deity, embracing the universe in his immense survey, and absolutely governing it all with almighty power,—to such a being, I say—and such Jesus was if he was God—it is every way unreasonable to suppose that the possession of all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, on the one hand, or any of the privations or sufferings of human life, on the other, could occasion any temptation at all.

Again, as it is allowed that God cannot *suffer*, to say that Christ was God and yet did suffer, is another contradiction,—a thing not at all above reason, but plainly contrary to it. For what avails that trite reply, that he did not suffer *as God* ? If God suffered at all, whether in the assumed nature of man or any other, still he suffered, and the assertion that he cannot suffer is falsified. Yet let me ask with reverence, what suffering the scene of crucifixion could have inflicted on a mind whose presence was, at that moment, throughout the universe, diffusing bliss and receiving adoration ? If a petty insect inflicts its minute wound on a remote portion

of our body, while all our nobler faculties are occupied with some animating pursuit, how little do we feel it! Such, but infinitely less, would be the sufferings of humanity to a being enjoying, at the same moment, the unutterable bliss of Deity.

But this is not all. *Jesus died.* Then if Jesus was God, it becomes an undeniable fact that *God died.* What avails it to say that he died not *as God*? It is a pitiful evasion, a paltry quibble. I submit it to every pious and enlightened Christian, that it is not fitting to suppose that the *living God, the King of ages, who alone hath immortality*, can take on himself to die, in any form or nature whatever. It would be to divest himself of his very essence. Yet if he could, what would death have been to him, who all the while never ceased to live in transcendent glory? Something less than it is to us when a single hair dies on our heads, and drops unnoticed to the ground.

Orthodox Christians seem to be much divided on the question, whether, in assuming human nature, God the Son, as they speak, did or did not actually lay aside the glory and bliss of his divine nature. They appear here to be on the horns of a dilemma. If he did not, they encounter all those contradictions which have been already noticed. And besides, what will then become of that favourite topic of popular preaching, the love of Christ in leaving his divine glory, and abasing himself to the low and

suffering condition of humanity? And where will be that mighty penalty, supposed to have been paid as an equivalent for the punishment due for all the sins of all mankind? But if he did thus change himself, what becomes of the immutability of the divine nature and perfections? What greater change could befall God than this, if for a space of thirty years, divested of his divine majesty and glory, he absented himself from the adoring millions of his creatures, going, as it were, on a pilgrimage to this little spot of earth, to be absorbed in its small affairs, and overwhelmed in shame and misery? How can those who address their devotions to him be assured that he may not, at any moment, be again withdrawn from his high station on some similar errand? Such notions may comport well enough with a mystical reverie or a religious romance, but are they like the words of truth and soberness,—are they worthy of God? We may rather say, that where such views prevail, words lose all their meaning, and religion is no longer a rational service, but a jargon of mystical sounds, destitute of all intelligible sense. These, while the superstitious crowd devoutly repeat, the scoffer hears with ill-concealed complacency. The enlightened Christian is silent and sad.

We are therefore not ashamed to own, that we highly value the use of reason in religion, and are not moved by the popular cry which is raised



against it. It has been well said, that no man is against reason till reason is against him. All parties are fond enough of reasoning in defence of their own systems, though they will hear no reason against them. But, in fact, reason is never better employed, than in exploring divine truth, and ascertaining the sense of Scripture. The word of God is addressed to us as reasonable beings, and does not therefore always avoid lying open to misinterpretations, supposing that our own good sense will be a sufficient guard against them. But if men choose to bury their talent in the earth, and fixing their eyes only on the letter of Scripture, allow themselves to embrace with equal readiness the most rational and the most extravagant doctrines, the fault of their delusion is their own. In some places, it is admitted, the Scriptures are *hard to be understood*, and such persons, "*being unlearned and unstable, wrest them to their own condemnation.*"\* But let those that are wise take warning. Religious absurdities are imposed on our consciences under the pretence of *mystery*; but that is an ominous name, and bodes ill to those systems which seek its shelter. For of *Babylon, the mother of spiritual abominations*, we read, that *she hath on her forehead the name of MYSTERY*; and a warning is added: "*Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her plagues.*"† Away, then, with this

\* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

† Apoc. xvii. 5.

odious and antichristian pretence of mystery, the watchword of priestcraft and tyranny! *What God hath revealed is mystery no longer ; it belongs to us and to our children ;* and it is both our duty and our privilege to understand it. The maxim of the student of the Bible must be, *Free inquiry and rational interpretation.* Faith in absurd and unintelligible doctrines is honourable neither to God nor man, and leads to corruption of men's morals no less than to debasement of their understandings.

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## CHAPTER VI.

## ON HUMAN NATURE.

IN the foregoing pages I have endeavoured to exhibit the opinions of strictly monotheistic Christians in regard to the unity of God and the humanity of Christ, those two great topics on which the controversy between them and their opponents mainly hinges. As, however, in what is called orthodoxy, there is a certain system of doctrines having so much natural alliance with one another, as to be commonly embraced or rejected together, so is it also in the opposite system. It will now, therefore, be my duty to notice the chief of those

*associated opinions* which do commonly go to make up this latter scheme of faith.

In the first place, then, monotheistic Christians differ from their opponents in thinking *less unfavourably of human nature*, and of man's moral position before God. They do not hold what is commonly called the doctrine of *original sin*, whether it be considered as implying an imputation of the guilt of Adam's transgression to his posterity, or a lapse of human nature from its original righteousness or moral virtue; or, lastly, that kind and degree of actually existing moral depravity which is commonly ascribed to it. This three-headed theological Cerberus they are inclined to consider as belonging to what may be called *Christian mythology*, and as having no sanction in holy writ, any more than it has in natural reason.

Where, indeed, do we find any text in Scripture which speaks of the *imputation* of Adam's guilt to his descendants,—a mode of proceeding so opposed to our natural sentiments of equity? There is certainly a passage of Paul, in which he says, "*that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and that so death has passed upon all men.*"\* But the apostle immediately explains himself by adding, "*because all have sinned.*" And what follows shews that he meant, that all have sinned in the way of *actual transgression*, though not exactly

\* Rom. v. 12.

in the same form as Adam. Mankind, therefore, though in the historical sequence of events they followed their progenitor in sin and its penalty, yet in point of moral retribution became subject to death, not for his sin, but for their own.

We further ask, what there is in the scriptural history of our first parents, to shew that their *moral nature*, or constitution, ever underwent any notable change for the worse subsequently to their first creation? There is surely no evidence of a very exalted original virtue, in the fact, that neither of the two individuals who then represented the human race, could maintain obedience to a single, definite command, issuing impressively from the lips of their sovereign Creator and Benefactor, addressed directly to themselves, enforced by the most solemn sanctions, free from all ambiguity, and moreover having nothing in it of hardship or difficulty, and little even of temptation. Here was no arduous struggle of virtue, no patient endurance of suffering ; nothing was required, save, in the midst of a garden of delights, to abstain from the fruit of one forbidden tree. Are we not obliged to impute the conduct of the first pair to unhallowed curiosity, vanity and pride, combined with a weak and culpable indulgence of sensual appetite? Was it not marked by gross ingratitude, impiety and presumption? In short, is not the fact of the fall a proof of the pre-existent moral weakness of the nature which

fell? Are not all the circumstances of the fall such as to indicate, that the moral virtue of Adam's original nature was not of any essentially higher order than that of his posterity?

It is a confirmation of this view, that in no passage of Scripture is the character of Adam made a subject of particular praise, any more before than after his transgression. Paul says, that "*the first man was of the earth, earthy;*" and again, "*that was not first which was spiritual, but that which was animal*" (τὸ ψυχικόν). The apostle therefore views Adam as being, from the beginning, an *animal* man; and contrasts him with Christ, the *spiritual* man; and this is agreeable to the tenor of holy writ. The *angelic* Adam of our theology would therefore appear to be a fabulous character. The Adam of Scripture was evidently, by nature, a frail and erring mortal, who surrendered his innocence to the first temptation by which his virtue was tried. But that his commission of this sin changed his *nature*, and that of his posterity, is a doctrine supported by no analogy of experience, and, so far as I can find, by no testimony of Scripture. There we read that the first man's transgression changed not his nature but his state; that he thereby forfeited the privilege of access to the tree of life, and thus incurred the lot of mortality. But of this more hereafter.

It is, however, objected, that the Creator pro-

nounced Adam, together with all his other works, *good*; which, it is contended, he could not have done, unless human nature was better at first than it is now. *Goodness*, however, is of various kinds and degrees. There is a sense in which "*none is good save one, that is God*;" and perhaps in inferior celestial beings, we may believe that there may be a high moral perfection and superiority to temptation, such as belongs not to the best of men. But that goodness which God saw in all the works which he had created, what was it but their *conformity with his designs*,—their fitness for the purposes of their creation? This goodness, then, was common to Adam, with all other creatures, and the particular grade of his nature in moral excellence had nothing to do with it.

Yet might he have been pronounced good in another, and that a *moral* sense. For from actual transgression he was then free; his dispositions and passions were all uncorrupt in their natural simplicity; there was, indeed, as yet, no object to disorder or pervert them. Adam, then, at this time, had the goodness of *innocence*; such as we love in infancy; such as Jesus commended when he said, "*Suffer the little children to come to me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven*." O blindness, O callousness of theological prejudice! It can allow goodness, without difficulty, in the crafty spider, the poisonous viper, and the ravening wolf; but not

in the smiling babe, the offspring of human kind ! This, from its birth, is tainted and depraved, accursed of God, and "*deserving his wrath and damnation.*"

Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum !

It is also objected, that man is said to have been *made in the image of God* ; and it being assumed that this image is now lost, it is inferred that human nature is changed. In a small compass more bad logic was, perhaps, never put together. Wherein, let us ask, does the Scripture intimate, that the divine image in man consisted ? "*God said, Let us make man in our own image, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea,*"\* and so on. Nothing is here said of holiness or moral virtue, but it is plainly implied, that the divine image, as here spoken of, consisted in that dominion over the animal creation, wherewith, as God's representative, man was invested through his intellectual superiority. It is in harmony with this interpretation, that Paul admonishes the Corinthian church, that a MAN *ought not to pray with his head covered*, "*forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God.*"† These two passages are, I believe, the only ones in which man is said in Scripture to bear the *image* of God. In both, the reference is plainly to his authority and dignity, not to his moral goodness ;

\* Gen. i. 26.

† 1 Cor. xi. 7.

and we also see that, in Paul's time, this image was *not yet lost*.

There is not, then, we think, any scriptural proof that the first man was endowed, at his creation, with any higher moral nature than his children still bring into the world at their birth. Doubtless God did "*create man upright*," and he still creates man upright. Every child is created upright at his birth; though such is the moral frailty of man's nature, that, as he grows, he more or less corrupts himself, both socially and individually, through "*seeking out many inventions*." Yet this is not forced on him. He might do better, *if he would*; but he does not so *will*; his virtue fails in face of the temptations which beset him. "*He finds a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin.*"\* This is a mystery to us, and probably will ever remain so; but the fault, if such it be, was in our nature from the beginning.

If Adam had resisted temptation, and preserved himself from transgression, the scriptural narrative seems to imply, that God had *covenanted* to preserve him from the consummation of that law of mortality which is naturally inherent in flesh and blood. The *tree of life* seems to have been a token of some especial grace, through which, so long as he should eat of its fruit, he would, in some way unex-

\* Romans vii. 23.



plained, escape the power of death. But when he was driven out of Paradise, he could no longer reach the mystic fruit, and the covenant could no longer avail him. From that day forward, man became subject to the original law of his nature: "*dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.*"

Therefore, what man incurred by his transgression, was not so much a positive penalty, as the loss of a high, extraordinary and supernatural privilege, attached conditionally, by special favour, to his innocence. If, then, we behold in this transaction something of the severity of God, yet surely there is more that displays his goodness. But in Christ the forfeited privilege is restored: not in form, indeed, but in substance; and more than restored. It having been proved, that our present nature is thus prone to sin, Death is allowed to do his work, and close this earthly scene. But his triumph is short. The resurrection bursts the tomb, ushers man again into being in a renewed and more perfect nature, and endows him with a securer immortality. In this view of things the apostle exults: "*If by one man's offence, death reigned by one, much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.*"\*

Having thus endeavoured to shew, that there is no scriptural warrant for the common doctrine

\* Romans v. 17.

of a departure of man's nature from its original measure of righteousness or moral virtue, I now come to the remaining head of our present subject, and have to notice the injurious and extreme dogma of the current theology respecting man's *actual depravity*. And we may take our distinction thus. The dogma which we here oppose, declares man's nature to be *radically and totally depraved, so that all which he naturally does is more or less wicked, and that he is consequently, even from his infancy, a just object of God's wrath and condemnation.\** We are taught to look even on the babe sleeping in its cradle, as a depraved, tainted being, full of nothing but evil, and odious to its Maker's holiness. In short, the heart of man is represented to be naturally so corrupt a fountain, that nothing but foul streams can flow from it.

Now in order to judge of the truth of all this, let us reflect for a moment on the moral constitution of our minds. It is generally admitted by our best mental philosophers, that there are no elementary principles in the human mind essentially wicked or evil; but that all the principles there implanted are designed for good purposes, and capable of fulfilling them, when exercised in due subordination to those which ought to govern. Moral evil, therefore, consists in the *excessive* energy with which inferior principles sometimes act, so as

\* Articles of Religion, ix. and xiii.

to overpower others which ought to control them. In this view of the mind we see disorder, or morbid affection, rather than natural depravity.

It shall however be conceded, that if human nature were such as generally to beget a decided predominance of vice and wickedness, in spite of all outward circumstances favourable to virtue, we should not much err in regarding it as tainted with an inherent depravity. We cannot, however, concede that such is the fact. On the contrary, it appears to us, that when men are placed from their childhood in such circumstances as to do their nature justice ; when their understandings are enlightened with clear views of the grounds of duty ; when a knowledge of God, in his excellence and purity, is among the convictions of their souls ; when their fellow-creatures have behaved to them in a kind and reasonable manner ; when their minds have been led to consider those consequences of vicious conduct which display the evil of sensual excesses, and the need of restraining them ;—in such cases, I say, we think that the abundant fruits of habitual moral excellence which men do in fact exhibit, fully refute the doctrine of their natural depravity. And it is only in such a situation that human nature is fairly tested. Good fruits cannot be expected but from good soil and culture.

Let it not, however, be supposed, that, even under the most favourable circumstances, we are claiming

for man anything like *moral perfection*. Very far from it. We confess that he is not only liable, but even prone, to sin. Neither his intellectual nor his moral constitution are of that high order which secures from error and misconduct. But is this frailty, this imperfection, to be branded as total corruption and depravity? Is there no mean between being essentially wicked, and being placed on the pinnacle of divine or angelic excellence?

Let those who are so fond of vilifying the moral constitution of the human mind, bethink them of what alterations they would make in it, if it were committed to their wisdom to be mended. Let them consider which passions and which appetites they would think good to eradicate, which to weaken, which to enforce. If I am not greatly mistaken, they would soon feel ashamed of their folly and presumption in undertaking such a task. They would be convinced, that the human mind is as perfect in its kind as the human body, and that to make changes for the better would lie as far beyond the wit of man in the one as in the other. They would learn to honour their Creator in that best and highest of his works of which we have knowledge; and they would cease to vilify themselves, their friends and their species, by doctrines as unfounded as they are debasing.

The nature of man, then, considered in a moral point of view, appears to be of a mixed and che-

quered character, neither entirely good nor entirely bad. The principles of duty, of love, and of a virtuous prudence, in which moral goodness chiefly resides, are natural parts of man's constitution, and they operate, throughout the race, with no inconsiderable force. Opposing principles—self-will, resentment, envy, covetousness, and the eagerness of appetite—also play their part; and between these a continual struggle for ascendancy is maintained. In the language of the Scripture, the former principles, with that aid which God's grace affords them, are called *the spirit*, and the latter are called *the flesh*. The struggle between these two is that war in the soul which is the experience of all good men. It is a struggle between the higher and lower parts *of our nature*; but that nature in which such a struggle generally exists, and often is happily determined, cannot be essentially and totally a depraved one.

Some will reply, that both the struggle and its happy termination, when that occurs, are the fruits of God's grace, and are not to be ascribed to human nature. This is making very nice distinctions. That they are gifts of divine grace we acknowledge with thankfulness; and so are all good things, both natural and spiritual. Yet they are that good part which God has been pleased to implant and foster *in our nature*. Their *source* is in him, but their *seat* is in us; they are his gift, but they are our

possession ; and we would not dishonour ourselves, through a false humility, in disclaiming all that gives us worth and virtue.

The consideration of the present subject prepares the way for a just apprehension of the nature of that *new birth, palingenesis, or conversion to God*, of which the Scripture often speaks. It is very commonly taught, that this is a *mystical* change, wrought on a man secretly, and often suddenly, by the spirit of God, whereby his original sin is removed, his old depraved nature taken away, and a new and spiritual nature given in the place of it. Divines of one school tell us, that this change takes place at baptism, even in infants ; others hold that it is independent of this, and belongs to later years. But, as rational Christians, we see neither need nor room for such a change at all. What we need is, not a new nature, but an enlightened and reformed state of mind ; and we believe it to be the teaching of the Gospel, that this is given, not by an occult and mystic act of divine power on the soul, but through the enlightening, elevating, purifying influence of divine truth on the mind and heart. This is an open and rational process, observable in progressive change of views and character ; not, for the most part, sudden, but gentle and gradual ; such as Jesus describes, when he compares the kingdom of heaven to the unfolding of the grain of corn ; "*first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.*"

I do not intend to say, that this changes comes without the spirit of God, or otherwise than by his sovereign grace; but only, that it is commonly effected through the agency of natural causes, suitable, though possibly not in themselves fully adequate, to produce it.

The *second birth* is needed, not because the first birth was evil, but simply because it was *animal*; and in the order of things, as Paul notices, "*that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is animal.*" The unfolding of the spiritual nature has to succeed in its time. It is in no sense an undoing of what went before, but a carrying of it onward continuously into a new stage of being. But the two things, though not opposite in nature, are yet quite distinct. The one is a growth of flesh, and blood, and animal life and instincts; the other, of wisdom, and knowledge, and pious reverence, and holy affections and virtuous purposes,—of all spiritual graces,—faith, hope and love, and all their train. These are "*the fruits of the spirit*;" these make "*the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and holiness.*"\* And herein we behold the development, under the cherishing beams of divine grace, of that higher part of man's nature, unshared by any lower animal, through which he is capable of communion with God, and of partaking of immortality.

\* Ephes. iv. 24.

## CHAPTER VII.

## ON CHRISTIAN REDEMPTION.

REPUTED orthodoxy teaches, that the death of Christ was *a penal satisfaction to Divine justice*. Monotheistic Christians are of opinion, that the Scriptures will in vain be searched for this doctrine. It also appears to them repugnant to the nature of equity, and foreign to the declared principles of the Divine government, that either guilt or righteousness should be held transferable from one person to another. They are at a loss to conceive in what way the justice of God could be illustrated by the substitution of an innocent victim in the place of the guilty, even though that victim were a voluntary sufferer. The great maxim of God's justice, as announced in his word, is, that "*he will render to every man according to his works.*" And again: "*The soul that sinneth, that shall die. The father shall not bear the iniquity of the son, nor the son that of the father.*"\* The curse of the law is denounced on the transgressor, and it can be no fulfilment of this threat to inflict it on any other but the transgressor. The alternative of suffering by *proxy*, or finding a *substitute*, is one which does not appear to be anywhere conceded by the law,

\* Ezek. xviii. 20.



and therefore, if a rigid fulfilment of the law be required, its authority cannot in any case be sustained by this expedient.

But the truth is, that the Divine denunciations against sin are never so expressed as to exclude the penitent from forgiveness. Blessed be God, there is not a word to that effect in the whole Bible. The very name by which the Almighty proclaimed himself, even to Moses the lawgiver, is a refutation of such a notion: "*The Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.*"\* Let it not therefore be imagined, that in pardoning the penitent, God recedes from his word, or makes his threatenings void. Whatever he has absolutely declared, he will doubtless strictly fulfil, as he did the sentence of mortality pronounced on Adam. But the sentence of everlasting condemnation in another world has never been pronounced thus *absolutely on all sin*,† but only on obstinate continuance in sin, with a wilful rejection of the offered mercy of the gospel. It is not therefore irrevocable, even after death. The admissibility, in all cases, of the truly penitent to pardon is everywhere sup-

\* Exod. xxxiv. 6.

† Watts, in one of his earlier writings, expresses this awful tenet of orthodoxy with a fearful accuracy :

"Curst be the man, for ever curst,  
Who does the smallest sin commit;  
Death and damnation for the first,  
Without relief, and infinite."

posed, and repeatedly declared, and that without any allusion whatever to the need of any expedient for satisfying divine justice. "*When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.*"\* And again: "*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"† Such is the plea which divine justice concedes to divine mercy in behalf of the transgressor, and it is one which we are assured will always be sufficient. Such a justice as would be deaf to this plea, would hardly deserve that name; at least, it would not be the justice of a father, but of a stern and inexorable judge, to whom mercy was unknown. Had it been our lot to live under such a system, it would indeed have been better for us if we had never been born.

But, in fact, we are not so unhappy. The government of God is paternal, and his justice is but a phase of his goodness. It springs from the same fountain of eternal love as does his mercy. Philon beautifully says, "*With God mercy is older than justice.*" His punishments are not so much vindictive as corrective. They have in view the amendment and ultimate salvation of the offender. His chastisements are the strokes of a father's rod. In short, the whole aspect and dealing of God toward the returning sinner, are those which the Lord has

\* Ezek. xviii. 27.

† 1 John i. 9.

portrayed in the parable of the Prodigal Son : "*His father saw him afar off, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And said, This my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found.*"\*

We see, then, that to represent our redemption in Christ as in any way a *forensic* transaction—whether as a satisfaction to penal justice, as a vicarious punishment, or as a discharge of a debt due to God, or anything of that kind—is not to abide by the language of Scripture. That ever speaks of it as an act of the *free grace* and *unpurchased mercy* of God, proceeding entirely from himself.

But however free and gracious this dispensation of mercy on the part of God, it does not follow that there may not have been *some particular mode of conducting it*, which would be most suitable to his wisdom and righteousness as the Ruler and Judge of the world. As there is a *proper way* of doing everything, so there is a proper way of granting forgiveness ; and we are assured by numerous testimonies of Scripture, that the proper way, in the view of divine wisdom, of granting to the human race that forgiveness and deliverance from the consequences of their sins which are imparted by the Gospel, was such an agency, or *mediation*, as the history of Christ presents in all its parts, and especially in his death.

And this is surely all that we really know on the

\* Luke xv. 29.

subject. It amounts to this: that *Christ died for us, and that the end, or design, of his death was, that our sins might be finally and completely forgiven, in the way most agreeable to the divine wisdom.* “*He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.*”\* The great penalty of sin was the sentence of mortality; the resurrection of Christ opened the way, through death, to a new and immortal life, and therefore, in effect, abolished the penalty, and implied a complete forgiveness. His previous “*obedience unto death*” was required by God as a proper preliminary to these great events. “*It became him from whom are all things, and through whom are all things, to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.*”†

These great and simple facts, viewed in connection with one another, constitute, as far as I see, the sum-total of the information which Scripture affords on this subject. Various modes of expression are employed, but the import of all is substantially the same. We read that “*Christ died for our sins;*”‡ that “*his blood was shed for the remission of sins;*”§ that “*he is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.*”|| In more express allusion to the observances of the Mosaic ritual, he is said to have “*offered himself as a sacrifice for sins,*”¶ and is called the “*Lamb of God, which taketh away the*

\* Romans iv. 25.

† Hebrews ii. 10.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 3.

§ Matt. xxvi. 28.

|| 1 John ii. 2.

¶ Heb. x. 12.

*sins of the world.*"\* Yet it is obvious, that Christ could not have been called a *sacrifice* in a *literal* or *ritual* sense, because in that case he must have died, not by the hands of the civil magistrate as a criminal, but of a priest, and on an altar. But in a figurative sense, every offering which piety devotes to God is called a *sacrifice*; and if the end in view be the pardon of sin, then such an offering may fittingly be called a sacrifice for sin. Of this kind was the offering which Jesus, in most pious obedience to the will of God, made of himself, to suffer and to die for the sake of human redemption.

But some, perhaps, will be ready to inquire into the *reason* of this method of salvation. Why, they will ask, was it necessary that the *Mediator of the new covenant should thus be perfected through sufferings*? In what way could the death of Christ facilitate the forgiveness of sins? Now I apprehend that the Scripture does not formally explain this point, and therefore that nothing that can be said respecting it, will be entitled to be considered as strictly a matter of Christian doctrine. But we may be allowed to offer it as our opinion, that this method of salvation was adopted, among other reasons, because it was the best fitted to impress on the minds of men such a dread of sin and fear of God, as it was proper to secure in connection with their forgiveness. The exercise of lenity toward

\* John i. 29.

offenders is a thing naturally liable to abuse ; and if the dispensation of mercy had been attended with circumstances less impressive, we might have been left with too light a sense of the malignity of sin, and of the difficulty of deliverance from its consequences.

And, moreover, as this method of salvation makes the evils of transgression conspicuous, so does it also illustrate the *transcendent excellence* and *bright reward of perfect virtue*, and especially as distinguished from the inferior merit of repentance after transgression. For it is not until Jesus has perfected his own obedience by the suffering of death, that he becomes the author of salvation to his offending brethren. Thus even the grace shewn to the offender is thrown into the form of a reward to the obedient.

But, above all, we must remember here the transforming *power of the cross*. It is this pre-eminently which subdues the power of sin in the heart, and replaces it by a devout and grateful love. Jesus himself said, "*If I be lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men unto me.*"\* This has been found true in every age. "*The love of Christ,*" said Paul, "*constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then verily all have died ; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but*

\* John xii. 32.

unto him who died for them, and rose again."\* Thus was opened the deep and inexhaustible fountain of Christian love,—love stronger than death, cleansing from all sin, and overcoming the world. Herein was our redemption complete. And thus, too, by the self-sacrificing love of Jesus, a new and living way being consecrated and commended to the imitation of all his people, the old way of ritual sacrifice was for ever superseded and done away.

Such being the work of Christ in our redemption, it remains that we should notice the *terms of acceptance with God* which, under the Christian covenant, are granted to man. We regard these as comprising *repentance, faith* and *obedience*. The absolute necessity of each of these three conditions, in order to our justification,—that is, to our admission into that state of pardon and grace which all true Christians enjoy,—does not, in our opinion, admit of any controversy. Let it not, however, be thought, that in thus speaking we seek in any way to invalidate the doctrine of Paul concerning *justification by faith*,—that great pillar of evangelic truth, whose essential value Luther only justly estimated, when he described it as *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesie*,—*the point by which the church stands or falls*.

This doctrine of *justification by faith*, is, in effect, the doctrine of *divine grace, in the failure of human*

*merit*,—of free forgiveness, instead of the terror of a broken law,—of Christian liberty and simplicity, instead of the slavery of a complicate ceremonial,—of the spirit and principle of piety, instead of exact rectitude of outward conduct. The doctrine may be thus stated. If we so believe in Christ as to repent of our sins, and sincerely strive to follow his precepts, our faith is reckoned or imputed to us for righteousness,—that is, in consideration of it, we are pardoned and received into the Divine favour. The *righteousness of the law*, to use the language of the apostle,—that is, the righteousness of a perfect and sinless obedience to the Divine commands, whether judged by the law of Moses or the light of nature,—we can never possess; for all men are sinners. Our obedience, then, being imperfect, does not in itself justify us, but rather leaves us condemned; but *we are justified by the grace of God, who in the absence, and in the place, of a perfect obedience, is graciously pleased to accept the Christian's faith.* “For this,” says Paul, “*is the doctrine of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus Lord, and believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*”\*

But this grace, which is extended to our frailty, is not extended to our wilful continuance in sin. It supplies the want of what we cannot do, but

\* Romans x. 9.



does not supersede the requirement of what we can do. Hence we read, that it is "*the just who shall live by his faith* :"<sup>\*</sup> it is to the penitent sinner and the good man, not to the obstinately wicked, that this indulgence is granted. It is not true, therefore, properly speaking, that we are justified by *faith without works* ;<sup>†</sup> for though we are justified by faith *without the works of the law*,<sup>‡</sup>—that is, without a perfect conformity either to the law of Moses, or any other prescribed rule, which it is beyond our natural infirmity to attain,—we are not justified, nor can be, without those works of Christian obedience which a true faith is fitted and adequate to produce ; and which, in fact, do spring from it, as naturally as a good tree brings forth good fruit. In fact, it is only in the performance of these, that true and saving faith has its existence. For, as it is written, "*In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.*"<sup>§</sup>

Now for the *reason* of what has been said above, we may observe, that the distinction between faith and works is nearly the same as that between the *inward principle* or *motive*, and the *outward action*. Whatever our conduct be, it is only so far as it proceeds from religious faith, that we act from a regard to God. "*For he that cometh to God must*

\* Romans i. 17.

† James i. 24.

‡ Romans iii. 28.

§ Galat. v. 6.

*believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Without faith, therefore, it is impossible to please him ;*\* because, in that case, there can be no regard to him, and therefore no religious motive or merit. The doctrine, therefore, of *justification by faith*, is about equivalent to this, —that *our obedience being imperfect, God is pleased to consider in our favour the principle, or motive, from which, if we be truly pious, it springs, namely, a regard to himself.*

In these views of this much debated subject, we appear to ourselves to maintain “*the doctrine that is according to godliness.*” We ascribe a man’s salvation, not to his own merits, as some falsely accuse us, but to the grace of God. But, at the same time, we remember, that the promises of God are made to *those only who continue patiently in well-doing ;*† and the opinion that we are justified by *faith alone*, independently of personal righteousness, we regard as injurious to religion, subversive of holiness, and repugnant to a thousand scriptures.‡

It should never be forgotten, that Christ came to save us, not only from the guilt of sin, but from its power. These two things are inseparable ; they are practically one. No man, therefore, is a partaker of Christian redemption any farther than, through

\* Hebrews xi. 6.

† Romans ii. 7.

‡ On this subject the reader will do well to consult Locke’s excellent tract on the *Reasonableness of Christianity*.

faith in Christ, his heart and life have been renewed in holiness and virtue. *"For he only that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous."*\*

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### ON THE NATURE AND INTENTION OF THE RITE OF SACRIFICE.

THE religious rite of sacrifice is so familiar to our minds, through reading the history of past ages, as well as from the accounts which we still receive of the practice of it among some barbarous nations, that we are hardly aware how singular and almost inexplicable a thing it really is. With our present enlightened views of the Deity, as the Maker and Preserver of all things, and the Giver to us of life, and breath, and all that we are or have, it is difficult for us to imagine what propriety there could ever have appeared to be in a man's taking on himself to present any offering or gift to God. If we attempt to give any reasonable account of this, it can only be done by supposing that, in the infancy of human existence, the mind of man was in a state so simple and rude, that it was only through the intervention of material emblems that

\* 1 John iii. 7.

it could effectually be awakened to religious sentiment, or engaged in the performance of divine worship. We must suppose, then, that it was a condescension of the Almighty to man's infirmity in that dawn of his being,—a stooping to the narrowness and dulness of his perceptions,—that led the Most High either to suggest to the first sons of Adam, or to accept from them, this gross and almost absurd form of homage to himself.

We read that of the two earliest of the children of man, Cain and Abel, one devoted himself to agriculture, the other to the pastoral life. The idea, whencever derived, appears to have struck them, that it became them to express their gratitude and reverence toward God, by presenting to him an *offering*, so far as was possible, of the fruits of their respective labours. So "*Cain brought a gift from the produce of the soil, and Abel from the firstlings of his flock.*"\*

We need not suppose, that even these primitive men were so ignorant as to imagine that these offerings could, in themselves, be of any value to the Deity, or afford him any gratification. It appears more probable, that they regarded the rite which they performed, as a *symbolic expression* of those sentiments of gratitude and veneration which they owed to the Giver of all good ; and in which, whatever be the mode of worship, its essence must ever

\* Genesis iv. 3.

consist. Men themselves, they were fain to think of God as if he were, in some sense, a man likewise. If they might not approach him so, they were at a loss how to approach him at all.

Now it deserves notice, that this rite of sacrifice was probably, from the beginning, of the nature of a *religious eating*, or sacred feast, as we certainly find it to have been in after ages. For it was only a small part of the offering that was consumed by burning, or otherwise devoted to God: the bulk of it was reserved to be eaten by those who offered it. Along with the due honouring of God, there was therefore an act of religious fellowship between men, symbolized by eating together. For to eat together, in all ages and nations, civilized and rude, has ever been a token of friendship and goodwill; and as such it is still consecrated to Christian love in the Lord's Supper. I think, then, we ought not to doubt, that this *social* benefit was one of the primary objects of the institution of sacrifice.

On the occasion, however, of which we are now speaking, this benefit was not obtained. There was discord between the worshippers. The elder brother had conceived a jealousy and grudge toward the younger; because, as an apostle tells us, *his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*. Although, therefore, they came together to offer their sacrifices, the great consecrating principle of mutual love was wanting. Accordingly we read,

that "*the Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offering; but to Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect.*"\*

The narrative proceeds: "*And the Lord said to Cain, Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.*"† It deserves notice here, that it is the opinion of the best judges, that the common rendering of the latter part of this passage is not correct; and, in fact, the Greek version exhibits another sense which appears to me preferable: "*If thou hast rightly offered, but hast not rightly divided, hast thou not sinned?*"—οὐκ εἰν ὀρθῶς προσενέγκης, ὀρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλγης, ἡμαρτες; this would seem to suggest the particular in Cain's conduct, which was the immediate ground of his rejection. It was this,—that though he had done rightly in bringing an offering to God of the fruits of his labour, he had done wrong in not rightly sharing with his brother the portion which it belonged to them to eat. Abel had brought flesh; Cain had brought vegetables and fruit. To make a pleasant and wholesome meal, it behoved that they should mutually impart to each other a portion of their respective provisions. This the angry feelings of Cain would not let him do. The present suggestion is, of

\* Genesis iv. 4.

† Genesis iv. 6, 7.

course, offered only as a conjecture. I think, however, that it has much probability.

Now this primeval sacrifice was a type of all that followed. It was a symbolic worship, expressing by certain significant acts and emblems, those sentiments and feelings which we now express more rationally by the words of prayer and praise. Its *essential idea* was that of *offering a gift to God*. Now, in common life, if we feel beholden to express thankfulness to a human benefactor,—if we wish to express homage to a superior, to conciliate his favour, to acknowledge a fault or deprecate his displeasure,—what is more usual and natural than to present some *gift* or *offering* which we hope will be acceptable to him? “*A gift*,” Solomon says, “*maketh room for a man, and bringeth him before the face of great men.*”\* And again, “*A gift in secret pacifieth anger, and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.*”† Such being the views with which men bring gifts to kings and lords and others to whom they wish to recommend themselves, it is easy to apprehend by analogy the train of ideas which prompted the sacrificial offerings of mankind to the Deity.

Under the Jewish law, sacrifices were distinguished as belonging mainly to two classes ; namely, the *thank* or *peace offerings*, and the *sin* or *trespass offerings*. The former were employed as an expres-

\* Proverbs xviii. 16.

† Proverbs xxi. 14.

sion of thanks to God, or to conciliate his favour, or simply to testify devotion and homage. These were *voluntary* on the part of the worshipper, not being required by any law. The sin offerings, on the contrary, were matters of obligation, being enjoined as an atonement, or condition of pardon, on those who had violated the law.

These offerings, of either kind, consisted for the most part of animals,—as bullocks, goats, sheep, lambs, and even doves and pigeons. The offerer devoted or dedicated them, by laying his hand on the animal's head, at the same time expressing by words his purpose in offering, whether of thanksgiving or confession of sin. The animal was then killed; its blood poured or sprinkled on the altar; some portions of the flesh burnt, as devoted to God; and the remainder either allotted to the priest, or divided between the priest and the worshipper, to be eaten on the spot. The poorer people, who were ill able to provide animals, were allowed to bring, instead of them, offerings of cakes, meal, fruits, oil, and other eatable things, according to their ability, and this *whether for sin offerings, or peace offerings*.

Such was, in general, the character and intention of these rites. And having thus noticed what they *were*, it will also be useful to observe, in one or two points, what they *were not*, as I believe that some misconceptions in this respect are very prevalent.

We have seen that, in its origin and true intent,



sacrifice was simply a symbolic form of worship, being employed as a mode of expressing those sentiments of gratitude, veneration and penitence, which still, under a more rational and spiritual economy, it is the business of our devotions to offer to God in the various forms of prayer and praise. But when *idolatry* had overspread the ancient world, and every conception and sentiment of religion had become corrupted and debased by its baleful influence, these pure and simple views of the nature and objects of sacrifice were abandoned.

As one instance of this, we find that men came to regard their offerings to God as something by which *he was to be benefited*, even as a man may be by gifts which he receives from his fellow-mortals. Men even became so wickedly presumptuous, as to fancy that they could thus bribe the gods to lend them aid, even in the prosecution of unrighteous purposes. Such an account we read of Balak, the king of Moab, who thought by the greatness of his offerings to prevail on Jehovah to curse Israel. The gross folly of such mean conceptions of the Almighty is finely reprov'd in one of the Psalms : "*I will take no bullock out of thine house, nor he-goat out of thy folds ; for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fulness thereof.*"

*Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.\** We are here taught, what is also declared in many other places, that all sacrifice is worthless before God, unless it be the offering of sincere piety.

The error which we have just noticed,—that of supposing sacrifice to have been a gain or gratification to the deity to whom it was offered,—attached to offerings of all kinds. There was another error, as I believe, which regarded only those sacrifices which were offered for sin. According to that view of them which was most simple and natural, as well as most rational and edifying, they served, in a symbolic way, as *confessions of guilt*, as *expressions of penitence*, and as *supplications for pardon*. But another idea, of a very different kind, at length intruded itself; namely, that the animal sacrificed was offered as a *victim to the divine vengeance*; that its death was in fact a *punishment*, which it underwent as a *substitute for the worshipper*; and that by this *vicarious punishment* a *satisfaction* was afforded to *divine justice*, in consideration of which the offender was pardoned.

Such views of sacrifice came at length to be widely diffused over the heathen world, of whose

\* Psalm l. 9.

imagined gods a merciless vindictiveness was too commonly an attribute. Truth compels me to add, that some very similar conceptions have obtained, and still retain, a prominent place in Christian theology. Of these I desire to speak with all becoming respect. Still our appeal must be to the truth of Scripture. Let any one read the Old Testament, and see whether he can find there a single passage in which it is taught, *that the animal offered in sacrifice suffered death as a punishment for the worshipper's sin*. Certainly, I can say, that I have myself searched diligently for such an instance, or anything to the like effect, and found none. I do not believe that any such explanation of the meaning or intention of the sin offering, can be found in any part of the Bible, Old Testament or New.

But it has been contended, that this view of sacrifice is implied in the very fact of the animal being slain, and its blood sprinkled on the altar. But mark the answer to this argument, for it is decisive. The animal was in like manner slain, and its blood poured on the altar, *in the peace offerings*, which were not offerings for sin at all.

Again, it has been thought, that in laying his hand on the head of the animal, while he confessed his sins, the worshipper must be understood to have indicated the transfer of his own guilt to the victim, *to be punished in it as a substitute for himself*.

This idea also may appear plausible, till we reflect, that here, too, the ceremony in question,—the laying the hand on the animal's head,—was common to both sin offerings and peace offerings. It could not therefore have any reference to the transfer of sins, but, without doubt, in offerings of every kind, was expressive simply of the dedication of the thing sacrificed to God.

The foregoing erroneous views of the nature of sacrifice becoming more and more prevalent, produced at length a most dreadful corruption of religion throughout the world. The gods of the nations came to be regarded as monsters of rapacity and cruelty; and the consequence was, that all who sought either to obtain their favour, or to avert their vengeance, deemed it necessary to gratify these their supposed dispositions. The more precious and endeared the victim devoted,—the more sanguinary and cruel the rites performed,—the better were these terrible deities supposed to be pleased. It was inevitable that from such a delusion in men's minds the most horrible results must ensue. It was not enough that the poor dumb animals were slaughtered by hundreds and thousands at a time. There was a fearful thought beyond,—a thought that was at first conceived with a shudder,—that was breathed in a whisper,—that was shrunk from with horror: Why not sacrifice a *man*? No offering so costly, — none will be so acceptable.

And soon the altars were reeking with the blood of unhappy captives, while priests and soothsayers were prying into the entrails of the yet palpitating victims. And soon came the accursed practice of offering to the gods human victims *still living*; and parents were causing their living children to pass through the fire into the burning arms of the grisly Moloch. In short, authentic history informs us, that at the time when Christ came there was hardly a nation under heaven, civilized or rude, in which the practice of *human sacrifice* was not found.

It belonged to the mission of Jesus to abolish the whole system of sacrificial worship; and so far as his teaching has been received, he has done it. No real sacrifice was ever offered in a Christian temple. This is a remarkable fact; for Jesus never expressly directed this change, nor did his apostles. It took place spontaneously, silently, as it were of itself. The old bloody rite slunk away, as if ashamed, from the light of the Gospel day. It was felt that the death of Christ, and the spirit of his religion had rendered it superfluous. The Baptist had cried concerning him, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*"\* Jesus himself, at the last supper, had taken the cup and said, "*Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many, for the remission*

\* John i. 29.

of sins."\* A greater and more perfect sacrifice had been made, once for all.

The idea that Christ's blood had been shed for this purpose, being once received, made all other offerings for the same purpose seem mean and worthless. The prevailing thought became such as that which we find uttered in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "*Christ having come, a chief priest of the good things which are to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands,—that is, not of this creation,—neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, hath entered once for all into the holies, having found everlasting redemption.*"†

But though the practice of the ritual sacrifices had passed away, yet the idea that the death of Christ, though a far more excellent offering, was, in its nature and ends, akin to them, and that it had been prefigured by them, led to a transfer to it of some misconceptions already popularly entertained respecting them. Of those misconceptions we have already taken some notice. The chief of them was, that the worshipper's guilt was imputed to the victim, and that the latter underwent a *vicarious punishment*. It was doubtless from this misconception respecting the sacrifices, that there arose a similar misconception respecting the intention of the death of Christ. But I trust it has

\* Matt. xxvi. 28.

† Heb. ix. 11.

been satisfactorily shewn, that for such a view there exists as little rational or scriptural foundation in the one case as in the other. Our redemption by God in Christ, as it had not the nature of a forensic, so neither had it that of a ritual transaction. Its whole character was providential and paternal: its whole efficacy lay in its power, not to propitiate God, but to regenerate the human heart.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### ON THE PROEM OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN.

WE have now reviewed all the principal points, in which the prevailing opinions of strictly monotheistic Christians differ from those which, in later ages, have commonly been called orthodox. In doing so we have also had occasion to state, in what manner they explain many of the passages of Scripture which are usually urged against them. Others remain, and more than the limits which I have prescribed to myself in this little work, will allow me to notice. There are, however, *two* passages of the New Testament, at once of such acknowledged difficulty, and such cardinal importance, in this controversy, that while I waive the consideration of

*textuary* argument in its full extent, I still feel it incumbent on me, with respect to these, to attempt such elucidation as may be in my power. They are the opening verses of the Gospel called John's, and of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

It is felt by all, that whatever of deity, or pre-existence, or other superhuman and mysterious dignity, is ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ in Scripture, is expressed more formally and explicitly in the former of these passages than in any other place. And hence it comes to pass, that the explanation which the several religious sects give of this passage, becomes a touchstone for their whole doctrine. If they palpably fail here, their entire system is inevitably condemned. From the time when this passage was written, down to the present day, it has never ceased to be, as it were, the focus of Christian theology, to which all eyes have been directed, and in whose concentrated light the essence of evangelic truth has been believed to be revealed.

Among those Christians who have held the Lord's strict and proper humanity, two leading views of the sense of this passage have found favour. Of these, the more ancient and the nearer to the church orthodoxy of after ages, was defended by many in the fourth century, but especially by *Photeinos*, bishop of Sirmium, by whose name both the doctrine and its espousers were in those times distinguished. The other, and comparatively



modern exposition, originated with Faustus Socinus in the sixteenth century.

Photeinos, a native of Galatia, became bishop of Sirmium, city of Pannonia, about the middle of the fourth century. In theology he was a disciple of Marcellus, bishop of Ankura, the principal city of Galatia, who seems to have entertained nearly the same doctrinal opinions, but not with so much fame. Both of them were persecuted, and removed from their sees, by the Arian party, who were at that time in power in the Eastern empire, and hardly less disposed to abuse their power, by tyrannizing over other men's consciences, than the orthodox themselves. Photeinos was deposed and banished by the council of Sirmium. It was in vain that the afflicted flock of this good man exerted themselves to the utmost to retain their beloved and venerated pastor, with whose life and teaching they were entirely satisfied. It was in vain that they refused to submit to the decree of the synod by which he had been condemned. The interference of the secular arm of the Arian emperors soon settled the question. Photeinos, however, though ejected from his bishopric, continued to maintain what he regarded as the truth, by such means as remained to him; for he seems to have been a man of much eloquence and learning, master both of the Greek and Latin languages, and likewise of blameless character. His followers continued for

several centuries to bear the name of *Photeinians*. But the days of darkness were at hand, when ecclesiastical usurpation, suppressing all religious liberty by the terrors of persecution, succeeded pretty completely, for a season, in crushing the sect, and left little occasion for the use of the name, except in the histories of the heretics.

No writings of Photeinos himself have come down to us ; but from the concurrent testimony of antiquity we gather that his opinions were *strictly monotheistic*, as distinguished both from those of Trinitarians and Arians. An ancient writer, Vincentius, expresses himself thus : "Photeinos holds the unity of God after the Jewish manner. He allows not of any trinity of persons. He says, that Christ was a man, taking his beginning from Mary. He denies the personality of the Word and the Spirit. There is only the person of God the Father, and the man Christ, that we ought to serve."\* As other testimonies entirely agree with this, I shall not cite them, except one only, in order to shew more clearly the distinction between the Photeinian interpretation and that of Socinus. Epiphanius informs us, that the Photeinian doctrine was, that "*the Logos, or Word, was from the beginning, but not begotten as the Son of God.*" The essence, therefore, of this doctrine, which is just that of most strictly monotheistic Christians of our own day, consisted in allowing that the Word, as mentioned

\* Lardner's Credibility, Vol. IV.

by John, was eternal and divine, but *making a distinction between this Word and the Son of God*, and holding that this latter title belonged only to the man Christ, in whose person the Word had *become flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth*. In fact, it is then, and not before, that the Word is spoken of as the *only begotten* of the Father. It is now become invested with a *human personality*.

According, then, to the Photinian interpretation, the prooimion of John may be paraphrased in this manner: "*In the beginning*,"—that is, before all things, or at least before all those things of which I am about to write,—"*was the Word*," that mighty, life-giving, supernatural energy, which we have witnessed, "*which our eyes have seen, and our hands have handled*," in attending on the ministry of Jesus. This divine power or principle, *this Word*, *was in the beginning with God*, inherent in his nature, and operative in all his mighty works. Nay, "*it was God*,"—it was nothing else than God himself; it was a part and portion of his own being, inseparable and undistinguishable from him. But, as I was saying, "*this Word was in the beginning with God. All things were done, or made, by it, or him, and without it was not anything done that has been done.*"\* *In it was life*;" it was indeed the true principle of all natural or physical life;

\* It appears to me rather difficult to decide whether this statement refers to the works of creation or those of the Gospel, and likewise whether the reference, in it or him, is to the Word or to God.

but not only so, there was in it a principle of life immortal, ready to quicken mankind from death: *it was the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us.\** We saw the graves opened, and the dead restored: we saw Jesus himself, the first-born out of death, ascend to immortality. "*And the life was the light of men:*"—this life-giving energy was as the light of morning, dispelling the darkness of night; the glorious prospect of the resurrection, abolishing the gloomy terrors of death. It was also the true spiritual light of the soul, overcoming within it the darkening influence of sin, enlightening and cheering both the understanding and the heart. "*And the light shineth in the darkness;*" the enlightening energy of God was putting itself forth in Jesus, and yet "*the darkness,*"—the moral darkness of the prejudiced and sinful world,—"*received or apprehended it not.*" Men did not recognize or regard it.

It was, however, the Divine purpose that it should be regarded. And to this end, "*there came a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a testimony, that he might testify concerning the light, that through him all men might believe. He was not himself the light;*"—it was not in his person that this extraordinary heavenly energy dwelt,—but he came that he might bear witness concerning the light. "*That light was the*

\* 1 John i. 2.

*true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world.*" It was the true light of every rational creature. It was God ; the good, the great, the unchangeable God ; the fountain of light uncreated ; the soul of the universe ; the sun of the intelligent creation. For so it is written : "*This is the message that we have heard of him, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*"\* Yes, he, the blessed God, the Father of all, "*was in the world, and by him the world was, and the world knew him not. He came to his own ; but his own people, the Jews, received him not. But as many as received him, he gave to them the privilege of being made children of God, even to those who believed on his name ;*" believed, that is, in his real presence and co-operation in the works which were done ; believed in Jesus, as sent by him, and acting by his power and authority. "*Behold, then, how great love the Father hath given us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*"† It knew him not, when he graciously visited us, and dwelt among us, in the person of his Son.

Moreover,—to resume my former subject,—"*the Word*"—that divine and life-giving energy which was from the beginning with God,—in due time, according to the counsel of his wisdom, "*became flesh,*"—was intimately united with, embodied in,

\* 1 John i. 5.

† 1 John iii. 1.

and manifested through, the medium of human nature. It entered into a peculiar and mysterious union with a human person; *and* in this form "*dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And we,*" the first followers of Jesus, "*beheld its glory; glory, as of*" one who, being thus filled with the present deity, as well as sustaining the character of the long-promised Messiah, might well be called "*the only begotten of the Father.*"

It has been one of my objects, in the foregoing paraphrase, to call the attention of the reader to the remarkable parallelism which exists between the opening of John's Gospel and that of his first Epistle. This appears to me to afford a strong confirmation of the correctness of the foregoing interpretation. And I may add, that this same interpretation has been embraced by *Lardner* and *Priestley*, as well as by most of the more distinguished monotheistic Christians of our own day.

But the scheme of Socinus has also found many advocates, even in our own age. This eminent and learned Italian, one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, raised the long fallen standard of monotheistic Christianity from the dust, and propounded its doctrines in a new form, farther removed from the current orthodoxy. From him as many as have professed a belief in Christ's proper humanity, in modern times, have commonly received the name of Socinians. They, however,

remembering the command of Jesus, to call no man their master but himself, have both steadily refused to adopt it, and endeavoured to discountenance its use as much as lay in their power.

Now according to the interpretation of Socinus, the term, the *Logos*, or *Word*, is to be taken merely as a *designation*, or *proper name*, of the man Jesus. "Joannes, Verbi nomine, intelligit ipsum dominum Jesum Christum, Dei filium, hominem scilicet illum, qui Augusto imperante e virgine Maria natus est." And he adds, "Non ob aliquam ejus naturam, aut substantiam, sed muneris tantum causâ quo functus est."\* The import of the whole passage is reduced to this: Jesus, who, as the great revealer of divine truth, is here called *the Word*, was in *the beginning*,—that is, of the events about to be related; and *the Word was with God*; that is, Jesus was known in the character of the Word to God alone,— "quatenus Dei Verbum soli Deo notus erat." And *the Word was God*; that is, Jesus may be so called on account of the divine powers with which he was endued, and especially on account of his being constituted Lord and Judge of mankind. For in a like secondary sense, angels, princes and judges, are sometimes called *gods* in the Old Testament. *This Word was in the beginning with God. "All things were done by him, and without him was nothing done that has been done."* Passing to

\* Explicat. cap. primi Joannia.

the 10th. verse, "*he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not*;" we find Socinus giving an explanation entirely his own: "Quid autem hoc loco sibi velit Joannes, a nemine; quod sciam, adhuc recte expositum fuit." He then proceeds to explain the passage thus: "Christum in mundo fuisse; hoc est, inter homines versatum esse, et mundum per eum factum esse; id est, homines denuo quodammodo factos et creatos fuisse." That is, that Christ was among men, and that men were in some sense made or created anew by him. Finally, in verse 14, *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*; that is, Jesus, *was flesh*; was truly a man; weak, sorrowful, despised, and subject to death, like other men.

Such is the outline of the Socinian interpretation. We may obviously observe this of it, that though the prooimion of John has the air and bearing of a grand and significant passage, yet if this be the true interpretation, it really imports nothing very considerable. It would rather seem a tissue of turgid expressions conveying very common matters; "*dare pondus idonea fumo*." Jesus is introduced under a name by which he was never known, and is called *God* by a stretch of language quite foreign to the New Testament. We are twice pompously informed that in the commencement of his ministry God only knew his real character; then that he



effected a moral renovation of the world, and finally that he was a man. All these things are doubtless true, and not without some interest; but there is plainly nothing in them beyond what may be called the commonplaces of Christianity; nothing added to the views which are much more fitly expressed in many other passages.

Convinced as I am that this Socinian interpretation is as untenable in a critical point of view, as it is poor, meagre and frigid in a theological, I shall not enter on a further consideration of it, because I consider that it already lies prostrate and expiring under the repeated attacks of the champions of orthodoxy. I only regret that in demolishing this outwork, they have been allowed any reason to imagine that they had stormed our citadel. The injudicious innovations of Socinus they have, I think, successfully exposed; but the sublimer views of the ancient monotheistic Fathers—men who read the Greek Scriptures as their native tongue, and who, though calumniated as innovators, were, in fact, the latest retainers of the apostolical doctrine, left in singularity by the progressive corruptions of it by the majority—will give them, I fancy, more to do.

I will now respectfully desire the Trinitarian reader, if I should have such, to consider candidly on what ground he identifies the *Logos* or *Word*, as here mentioned by John, with the person of Jesus Christ, or indeed regards it, apart from the Father,

as a personal subsistence at all. The evangelist says plainly, that "*the Word was God.*" Till, therefore, it can be shewn that the title of God belongs to any one else than the Father, this must be regarded as equivalent to saying, that *the Word was the Father*; an assertion most perfectly according with the tenor of this Gospel.

In saying afterwards that *the Word became flesh*, he certainly intimates a peculiar union between the Word and Jesus, between God and man; but he does not *identify* or *confound* them. Had the apostle in his other writings, or even had the other sacred penmen, been accustomed to speak of Jesus under the name of *the Word*, it would certainly have made it easier to concede a similar use of that phrase here. But it is not so: not a single instance of the kind occurs in all the New Testament. Once in the Apocalypse, certainly, a mysterious personage appears in the vision, whom the armies of heaven follow on white horses. He is styled *King of kings and Lord of lords*; and it is afterwards added, that his name is called the *Word of God*.<sup>\*</sup> Whether this mystic personage be really intended for the same who commonly in this book is symbolized as *the Lamb*, is quite uncertain. But admitting it to be so, an instance of this kind cannot fairly be quoted as proof of the current use of a designation which it rather appears for the first time to impose. Our

<sup>\*</sup> Apoc. xix. 14.

opponents should find a phrase like this : *And the Word said to his disciples* ; or, *And when the Word saw her, he had compassion on her*. Then, indeed, we would admit that this term is used as a personal appellation of Jesus.

Some contend that the distinct personality of *the Word* is implied in its being said to have been *with God*—πρὸς τὸν Θεόν. Not to be tedious, I shall simply refer to the parallel place in John's Epistle.\* There *the eternal life* is said to have been *with the Father*—πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ; and it is evident that under the several terms—*the word, the word of life, the life, and the eternal life*—the writer designates one and the same thing. But let me ask the candid reader, whether all these phrases be not more suitable for speaking of a principle or energy, or something of that kind, than of a person? There is surely nothing really difficult in the use here made of the particle *with*. In Job it is written, "*With God is terrible majesty*;"† in the Psalms, "*With thee is the fountain of life*;"‡ in the prophet, "*This reward is with him, and his work before him*;"§ and such instances abound.

Good illustration of the phraseology of this passage has been drawn from the Jewish Targums, or Chaldee paraphrases of the Scriptures ; and likewise from the works of Philon the Jew—writings

\* 1 John i. 2.

+ Job xxxvii. 22.

‡ Psalm xxxvi. 9.

§ Isaiah xl. 10.

familiar to the Jews of the apostolic age. Thus, for instance, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, the Targums say : "She confessed before the Lord whose word had spoken to her, and she prayed to the word of the Lord that had appeared to her." In their style, it was the *word*, or *mimra*, that brought Abraham out of Chaldaea, and in whom he believed. It was *the word* that redeemed Israel out of Egypt ; and so on. In short, all the acts of God are ascribed to *the word*, as the immediate agent ; and *the word of God* is a constant periphrasis for God himself.

Philon regards the *Logos*, or *Word*, as the *divine wisdom or reason*. "God," says he, "has two supreme powers, goodness and strength ; and between these is the *logos*, which unites them both." This writer, indeed, in other places gives this title to a certain great archangel, but this does not interfere with our present argument. It is sufficient that he, as well as other Jews, were accustomed to speak, after a personal manner, of a divine *Logos*, which they did not really regard as a person distinct from God. The same appears likewise from a passage in Origen, in his work against Celsus : "I have often disputed," he says, "with the Jewish Rabbis, but they would none of them acknowledge that the *Logos* is the *Son* of God."

If Philon, and such as philosophised with him, indulging in a wanton luxuriance of personification,

at length confounded figure with truth, and so ran into a sort of mythology on this subject ; as he does when he calls the Logos " the *most ancient Son of God*, and his *firstborn before the angels* ;" this is to be regarded as an extravagance of speculation, in which he was to be blamed, and not imitated ; but it does not follow that the apostolic writings should exhibit no trace of such of his ideas as were agreeable to truth. But one thing well deserves our observation, which is this : that the speculations of the Jewish writers of this school discover to us very plainly *the sources of what is now called orthodox Christian theology*. A personified divine and eternal Logos, called also occasionally God and the Son of God, was a conception ready provided before a word of the New Testament was written. We may therefore ask, what becomes of the notion that this doctrine is one derived from a divine revelation ? They may say, if they think so, that revelation, by the apostle John, has confirmed it ; but its invention and origin will still have to be sought among some of the most fanciful of human philosophists.

I would now request my reader to extend his reflections from this particular passage to the writings of this evangelist at large. Nothing can be fairer or safer than to make an author his own interpreter. When, from an extensive acquaintance with his works, we have become familiar with his prevailing sentiments and his peculiarities of thought

and expression, we are prepared to enter on the explanation of his difficult passages with a fair chance of success. And it is obvious, that this remark applies with greater force in proportion to the writer's peculiarity of style. That the writings attributed to John do exhibit a style of a very peculiar character, is generally admitted. But it may be of use to endeavour to discriminate with precision, in what this peculiarity consists. It is not enough to say, that the style is hyperbolical and figurative. This may be said of almost the whole volume of Holy Writ. One would rather say, that the conceptions of this writer are characterized by a cast of vagueness, abstraction and mysticism ; and that his style, though eminently simple in the language, is yet often obscure in the sense, from being allegorical or even enigmatic. The mode of expression also is strong, loose and unguarded.

Such being the character of this evangelist's style, it is obvious that some important practical inferences arise from this fact. One is, that we ought to be careful not to interpret *literally*, what was intended only *figuratively* or *allegorically*. Such we take to be the error of the Romanists, when they insist on the words of Jesus, that we must "*eat his flesh and drink his blood,*"\* as a proof of the doctrine of transubstantiation. And such we conceive to be the error of Trinitarians, when they adduce

\* John vi. 53.

Christ's declaration, that "*he came down from heaven,*"\* as a proof of his personal pre-existence before his birth.

John, if I mistake not, is to be viewed as a writer who engages his mind with contemplations too abstract and lofty for distinct and complete conception. Hence his occasional obscurity. He struggles with subjects of too vast and spiritual a nature, for the effectual grasp of the human intellect. Ideas impressive and sublime rise before his mind, but they are undefined and undefinable. Labouring with the fulness of his thought, he throws some utterance of it on his reader, in the best manner he can. It being impossible that it should be plain and accurate, he is satisfied if it be energetic, though loose and obscure; if it convey the force of the truth, though not strictly correct as to its form. I infer that those who would truly think with John, must lay aside the care of precision; must close their eyes for a season on the cold and clear perceptions of vulgar daylight; and allow their minds, like the disciples, once with their Master on the holy mount, to enter into a cloud—a cloud at once of mystery and of sacred light.

If I mistake not, the favourite and dominant sentiment of this evangelist is, that God, even the Father, in the person of Jesus, had been verily manifested among men; that he had, in effect,

\* John vi. 38.

dwelt among them, been seen of them, conversed with them ; that he had, as it were, personally made them acquainted with himself ; that he had shewn them his will, his grace, his life-giving energy ; that he had proved himself the true life of man, by which he should be quickened unto immortality. This was a grand idea, and it filled the mind of the apostle. Much as he personally loved his Master Jesus, yet, after all, what was man compared with God ? It was the thought that *God dwelt in Jesus*, and that in knowing him they had known the Father, that gave to his person its mighty and awful charm. It appears to me, that this somewhat peculiar conception of Christ breaks out all over the writings of this apostle. And this, perchance, it was, that led him to borrow, or adopt, some of the phraseology already in use about the *logos* or *word*, as affording him a method, which would be readily intelligible, of conveying some adequate impression of his views to his readers. He wished, as already observed, to express, in effect, that in the person of Jesus, God had, in a very direct and especial manner, been manifested among men. Yet not properly the divine essence itself, but something which proceeds from it, as the energetic agency of the Deity in his works, and in his communication with his rational creatures. A conception much akin to this was already current, and the terms of *mimra* or *logos* had been used to designate it. They



were suitable to the apostle's purpose ; they served to convey a grand, and not unjust, though somewhat indeterminate idea ; and therefore he employed them.

But some, perhaps, will now be ready to exclaim, Why this is *orthodoxy* ; this is *Trinitarianism* ! But not so ; because Trinitarianism maintains the union of the man Jesus, not with the Father, but with a second eternal person in the Godhead, God the Son ; which is a consequence of making the Logos a distinct person.

Others, perhaps, will suggest that our doctrine is *Sabellianism*. But not so ; because that sect confounded the Father with Jesus, as if they were one person. Hence they were said to ascribe sufferings and death to the Eternal, and were sometimes called *Patripassians*.

I apprehend the doctrine above propounded to be quite distinct alike from Trinitarianism, Sabellianism and Arianism. I have shewn, that when, through the progress of other opinions, it became sectarian, it was called Photeinianism ; but I believe that, in fact, it was nothing else than primitive monotheism and apostolic Christianity.

On the whole, I am of opinion that the Gospel of John, though commonly regarded as that part of Scripture which yields most support to Church orthodoxy, is in reality that which is most irreconcilable with it. This arises from its dwelling so

emphatically on the relations subsisting between the Lord Jesus and his heavenly Father, and that in words ascribed to the Son himself. In effect, it is here that the personal distinctness of Christ from God is brought out in the clearest light. And though the intimacy of the union between them is also most impressively exhibited, yet that does not hinder but that here, more than anywhere else, the Son acknowledges his subordinate and dependent position in terms the most absolute and decisive.

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## CHAPTER X.

### ON THE PROEM OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

THE Epistle to the Hebrews is of so argumentative a character, that it is necessary to attain a view of the design and drift of the whole, before we can address ourselves with advantage to the explanation of any particular part. This, therefore, I shall first endeavour, to the best of my ability, to assist the reader in doing.

The object of this Epistle appears plainly to have been this,—to confirm the Hebrew converts to Christianity in the profession of their faith, by pointing out the essential superiority of the New Covenant to the Old,—of the Christian to the

Mosaic economy. This view of the case is, I think, generally admitted. But if I am not greatly mistaken, we do not always so correctly apprehend the mind of the writer, in regard to the particular point on which his comparison between the two systems chiefly turns. It is common to suppose that it lay in something of this sort: that Christianity was spiritual, and Judaism ceremonial; or that the former was substantial, the latter only typical or figurative. And many would place it principally between the infinite efficacy of the great sacrifice of himself once for all made by Christ, and the comparative worthlessness and impotence of the sacrifices of the law,—the *blood of bulls and of goats*. Now I do not deny, that the writer does find topics of comparison advantageous to Christianity in each of these particulars, as he does likewise in many others, of which he avails himself in passing, in order to evince the excellence of the Gospel. Yet I am persuaded, that the intelligent student of this most elaborate and most elegant of all the books of the New Testament, will, on due inquiry, find that there is in it a dominant argument, distinct from all these, and of far greater weight and concernment, to which they are all in a manner made subservient.

In that argument, if I take it right, this eloquent advocate of Christianity has seized at once on the essential glory of the Gospel. If the comparison

which he instituted between the Old and New Covenants had terminated in any advantages of the latter belonging merely to the present life, the balance could not, after all, have been a matter of so great moment. But I apprehend that the contrast which he draws, lies just here,—that while the Law dealt only with things *seen and temporal*, the Gospel deals chiefly with things *unseen and eternal*; that while all the provisions and prospects of the one lie *on earth*, and are bounded *by this life*; the main scene, the great agencies, the glorious consummation of the other, lie *in heaven*, and extend *into eternity*. In this contrast consists, as it appears to me, the central argument of this Epistle.

And now let us glance briefly at the proofs of this. I cannot notice them all, but the most striking will be found in the description of Christ, as the *high-priest of our profession*, of his *priesthood*, of his *sacrifice*, of the *temple* where he serves, of the *worship* and *worshippers*, and of their *state* and *privileges as compared with those under the Mosaic institution*.

Having first recognized, and justified, the fact of Christ's having, like other high-priests, been "*taken from among men*,"\* and being therefore, by his nature, able to sympathize with the erring and suffering children of humanity, the writer proceeds

\* Hebrews v. 1.

to shew the superiority of Christ to the former priests, by observing that, though a human, he is, notwithstanding, an *immortal* being. For according to the conception of this writer, it is not as a mortal man, but as a spiritual man, as the *Son of God, in his risen and immortal nature*, that he sustains this character. "*Having learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he was called of God to be a high-priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedek.*"\*

The comparison of Christ with the remarkable personage here named, turns entirely on the point for which I am contending. The writer speaks of Melchisedek, as "*without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life,*" and that being thus "*made like to the Son of God, he abideth a priest in perpetuity.*"† Now all this, as far as Melchisedek is concerned, implies merely that the Scripture has recorded no account of his birth, lineage or death, nor of the origin or termination of that priesthood which he sustained. But on these negatives the writer seizes, as affording ground for explaining the predicted resemblance of the priesthood of the Messiah to that of this ancient worthy. It is indicated, he argues, that the priest Messiah would not be a mortal man, but the Son of God by the resurrection, immortal in his person, permanent in his

\* Hebrews v. 9.

† Hebrews vii. 3.

office. *"They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death. But this man, because he abideth for ever, hath the priesthood unchangeably. Whence also he is able to save completely them that come to God by him, ever living to intercede for them."*\* *"For the law constituteth men high-priests, having infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was after the law, constituteth the Son, who is perfected for evermore."*† And in another place he says, that Christ, *"through an eternal spirit,"* that is, an immortal nature, *"offered himself without spot to God."*‡

Our high-priest, then, is the risen and immortal Jesus; and his service and ministry likewise are not on earth, but in heaven. That is the true temple, in which he commenced his high ministration, when he entered it, once for all, with the sacrifice of himself, passing through the veil which hid the heavenly world, that is, his flesh. *"Of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. We have such an high-priest, who has sat down on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord hath pitched, and not man."*§ And again: *"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are but antitypes of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in*

\* Hebrews vii. 25.

† Hebrews vii. 28.

‡ Hebrews ix. 14.

§ Hebrews viii. 1.

*the presence of God for us. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, for then ought he often to have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the ages hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.\**

Such, then, is the priest, the temple, the sacrifice; immortal, heavenly and perfected for ever. But where are the worshippers, and what is their lot? Are they but dying men, and is their lot to abide without, in the cold porch and drear vestibule of this earthly state? No. As the priest and the temple are in heaven, the worshippers must be there likewise. Awhile, indeed, they remain without, desiring admittance; but their privilege is to *enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he hath consecrated for them, even the resurrection of the dead.*† “Ye are not come to the mountain that might be touched; but ye are come to the mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to myriads of angels, to the assembly and church of the first-born registered in the heavens; and to God the Judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.”‡ “Wherefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and fear.”§

\* Hebrews ix. 24.

† Hebrews x. 19.

‡ Hebrews xii. 18.

§ Hebrews xii. 28.

Thus briefly and imperfectly have I endeavoured to convey an idea of the leading argument of this Epistle, according to my conception of it. And having done this, I now turn to the elucidation of the somewhat difficult verses which occur at its commencement.

The Epistle opens with an announcement of the *official dignity* of the Messiah, but in a point of view which is in full agreement with the purport of the foregoing remarks. "*God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times past to our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he hath made the ages.*"\* This word *Son* may probably here, as often elsewhere, involve in it an allusion to the resurrection. Paul says that Jesus was "*declared, or defined, to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection of the dead.*"† And again, he refers to this event the words of the Psalmist, "*Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*"‡ In fact, it was *the risen Jesus*, the founder of the heavenly Canaan, who became heir of all the promises of the patriarchal and Jewish dispensations in their highest, that is, their spiritual sense. This subject is further unfolded afterwards; but in the words, "*by whom he hath made the ages,*"§ *τοῖς αἰῶνας*, he announces the

\* Hebrews i. 1.

† Romans i. 4.

‡ Acts xiii. 33; Psalm ii. 7.

§ Hebrews i. 2.



burden of his argument at once. What he here means by *the ages*, he soon afterwards well explains, as it appears to me, where he says, "*For not to the angels hath he subjected the world to come, whereof we are speaking*" \*—τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν, περὶ ἧς λαλοῦμεν. God hath in Christ made or founded for mankind a *future and immortal state*. By calling this state *the ages*, the writer indicates that it is everlasting, in contrast with the Mosaic economy, which was temporary.

The fine description of Christ's dignity which follows, belongs also to the risen and ascended Jesus. "*Who being a reflection of his glory, and an impression or character of his being, and carrying all things by the word of his power, having by himself made a cleansing of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*"† Here, then, at the right hand of the celestial Majesty, the writer places Jesus; here, if I mistake not, he especially contemplates him, as existing and discharging his high functions, throughout this Epistle.

The author now turns, somewhat abruptly, to a comparison of the risen and exalted Messiah with *the angels*, with intent of shewing that the Scripture has not intimated, with respect to these last, any similar high advancement and dignity. But why this comparison, and what is its pertinence in this place? I think the answer is this. The Jews

\* Hebrews ii. 5.

† Hebrews i. 3.

in general, of the apostolic age, expected the Christ to be a *man*, simply and properly, an illustrious descendant of David, who should rule, as a glorious temporal sovereign, over their nation, and redress its wrongs. Some idea indeed they had, that he would not be removed by death, like common kings ; but though this was a mystery, it had not led them to regard him otherwise than as truly and simply a human being. Now it was common among these same Jews, to consider that the old covenant had, in a very especial manner, been delivered and administered, under God, by *angels*. Of this fact there is good evidence in the New Testament ; and in the Talmudists and Philon there is much more, to which I shall here content myself with this general reference. On this angelic ministration in behalf of their law and nation, the Jews dwelt proudly, and speculated largely ; and we may rationally conjecture, that it had given occasion to some unfavourable reflections on the Gospel, as if it were a meaner system, introduced and conducted, under God, only by human agency. The humble life and ignominious death of Jesus would, of course, make the case still stronger, even to those who . believed him to be the Messiah.

Such being the state of things, it was very proper and seasonable for a writer whose object was to impress the mind of the Hebrew Christians,—who probably regarded the Lord too much *after the*

*flesh*,—with a higher sense of the dignity and value of the Gospel than they commonly entertained, to demonstrate, by scriptural testimonies, two things : first, the greater dignity of the offices and distinctions assigned to the Messiah, than that of any of those which had been mentioned as belonging to angels ; and secondly, the propriety and necessity of the Messiah's having gone through those humiliations and sufferings which had been seen in Jesus.

It is carefully to be observed, that the comparison here instituted between Christ and the angels, essentially *presupposes his natural humanity*. If the writer and readers of this Epistle had regarded him as God, or as by nature a superangelic being, the whole argument would have been superfluous and unmeaning. In fact, I believe that there is not in all the New Testament a passage more conclusive in favour of Christ's proper and simple humanity, than this which is so often alleged in proof of his deity.

The writer says, that the glorified Christ was made superior to the angels, *not by nature, but by inheritance*. In this last term there is great significance. By inheritance? How, and in what nature? Mark how he proves it. It is by shewing from Scripture, that it was *as a man*, as the promised *seed of Abraham* and *son of David*, that the Messiah inherited all the promises, benedictions and *other great things*, which belonged to Israel and his

kings. Hence it is, that in the quotations which he adduces, the writer freely avails himself of all that had been said or promised in relation to his ancestors, as belonging of hereditary right to the Messiah. He considered that whatever great things had been said, in regard to antecedent Jewish worthies, must be applicable to him, the great hope of the nation, in a still higher sense, and might therefore fairly be used in an argument whose scope was to shew the superiority of the Messiah, in regard to his divine calling, to the angelic spirits. For these were not heirs to these worthies, but the Messiah was.

These remarks will, I hope, appear to justify the following paraphrase of the whole passage which is the subject of this chapter. *God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in times past to our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son; whom he hath appointed heir of all things; by whom also he hath made, or founded, the ages, or eternal state. Who being a reflection of his glory and an impression, or likeness, of his being, and carrying, or conducting, all things by the word of his power; having by himself made a cleansing of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Being, in this his immortal state, made so much superior to the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels said he*

at any time,—as he does prophetically to the Messiah in the Psalms,—*Thou art my Son, to-day I have begotten thee? And again, I will be to him for a Father, and he shall be to me for a Son ?\**—as he says to Solomon, and therefore, a *fortiori*, to Solomon's greater descendant. And again, in that passage of the song of Moses, as read in the Greek Version, *where the first-born*, that is, the people of Israel, *is introduced into the land of Canaan*; it says, *And let all the angels of God worship him*,† or do him homage; which is parallel to that of Peter: *Who is gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him.*‡ But in regard to the angels, it saith: *Who maketh his angels spirits, or blasts of wind, and his ministers a flame of fire. But in regard to the Son: Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.*§ referring probably, in the latter clause, to Solomon, of whom primarily this psalm is evidently written. Then, addressing Solomon, “*Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*” And further with regard to the Messiah, the Scripture

\* 2 Sam. vii. 14.

† Deut. xxxii. 43: “Rejoice, O heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him.”

‡ 1 Peter iii. 22.

§ Psalm xlv. 6.

says, or rather represents him as saying, "*Thou, O Jehovah, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands.*" Then God, in answer to him, "*They shall perish, but thou remainest, and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou change them and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail:\**" that is, Thou shalt be immortal, and shalt establish an everlasting kingdom on the dissolution of the present fabric of nature,—a new heaven and a new earth.

If the reader should object to calling Christ "*the sceptre of God's kingdom,*" I would refer him to the apostolic father, Clement of Rome, who in his Epistle to the Corinthians, and apparently in allusion to this passage, calls him "*the sceptre of the Divine Majesty.*" If he has further objections to the manner in which I have interpreted this and the succeeding text, I will beg him to consider what other rational interpretation these two passages will bear. It is to be remembered that the writer is here arguing with Hebrew Christians *from their Scriptures*, and of course he must have designed to appeal to some current and admitted sense of those Scriptures. Now it is unquestionable, that the Jews in general expected their Messiah to be a man; and this very passage proves, that the Hebrew Christians whom he addresses,

\* Psalm cii. 25.

had themselves no other opinion of him, as is also confirmed by ecclesiastical history. We are therefore obliged to suppose, that the writer here appeals to some current application of these texts to the Messiah, and such as was in accordance with his natural humanity.

And it should further be observed, that this writer always quotes to the letter the Greek version of the Seventy. This version, then, was the Bible which he used, and it is to this that we must look to see how his quotations stand in their context. Now it appears to me, that in respect to the foregoing quotation from the 102nd Psalm, the antecedent context in the Greek does throw some light on the subject. A great and sorrowful personage—in whose mouth most of the Psalm is put, and who, to justify the quotation in this place, must be taken for the Messiah—is introduced, of whom it is said: “*He answered him in the way of his strength: Declare to me the shortness of my days,* ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ ἐν ὁδῷ ισχύος, αὐτοῦ τὴν ὀλιγότητα τῶν ἡμερῶν μου ἀνάγγελόν μοι; *take me not away in the midst of my days; thy years are throughout all generations. Thou, Lord, in the beginning,*”\* and so on. I am unable to imagine any other mode of interpretation, except that here suggested, which will make it appear intelligible how the Jews could apply this passage to the Messiah at all. If, how-

\* Psal. cii. 23.

ever, this interpretation should by any be deemed unsatisfactory, there remains that of Lardner and others, who take the whole passage as addressed to God—as there can be no doubt it was originally intended to be—and as applicable to the Messiah only indirectly, as indicating the glory and perpetuity of that kingdom, of which, under God, he was to be the founder and head. Or, lastly, if this should not be approved, it may be supposed, that the writer had in his mind the idea of Christ being an incarnation of the divine logos.

In contrast with all these great things said of Christ, the writer concludes by saying of the angels, "*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?*"

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## CHAPTER XI.

### FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE.

ALTHOUGH it is frequently asserted and generally believed, that the name of God is frequently given to Christ in the Scripture, it appears exceedingly doubtful whether this is really the case, even in a single instance.

The strongest example that could be adduced would probably be the exclamation of Thomas, on



his first beholding Jesus after his resurrection—  
*"My Lord and my God!"*\* It will be admitted that the apostle did not on such an occasion intend to give utterance to a theological doctrine, yet he certainly appears to address his Master with both these titles. Considering, however, that this was undeniably an exclamation of sudden surprise and admiration, I think we should hardly be justified in inferring from it any belief respecting Christ's nature, beyond that which his own recorded discourses were likely to have impressed on the minds of his disciples ; and that would not go farther than a recognition of *God in Christ*, in the sense in which he himself said, *"He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."*

Another prominent passage in which, according to our common version of the Scripture, Christ appears to be called God, is that which occurs in the Epistle to the Romans : *"Of whom according to the flesh was Christ, who is over all, God, blessed for ever."*† Εξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων, Θεός, εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. It was certainly in this sense that the passage was understood by most of the ancient fathers, though some denied that Christ could be called *God over all*. It must, however, be stated that, without violence or impropriety, the original words admit of a different rendering, which is determined by a different punctuation.

\* John xx. 28.

† Rom. ix. 5.

*Lachmann and Tischendorf*, followed by *Jowett*, exhibit them thus: Εξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα. 'Ο ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων Θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας; of which the rendering would be: "*Of whom was the Christ, as concerning the flesh. God, who is over all, be blessed for ever.*"\* On this I would say, that if the passage *may* be taken so, as I certainly think it may, it *ought* to be taken so; because this acceptance harmonizes with the rest of the Scripture, and especially with the rest of this apostle's writings; whereas the other acceptance introduces a new and strange doctrine, in violent antagonism with both. At any rate it is clear, that unless this doctrine can be adequately proved by other evidence, it ought not to be received on evidence so doubtful as this.

The assertion in the First Epistle to Timothy, "*that God was manifest in the flesh*,"† Θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, is set aside by a corrected reading, adopted in all the latest and best editions of the Greek original. It runs thus: 'Ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι; "*he that was manifested in the flesh, was justified in the spirit.*"

In the Acts our version reads, "*Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.*"‡

\* Similar constructions are not rare: as Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς εὐκογητὸς, εὐλογητὸς Κύριος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, Psalm lxviii. 19. Πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος, 2 Tim. iii. 16. Ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος, Rom. xii. 9.

† 1 Tim. iii. 16.

‡ Acts xx. 28.

But here there is a notable difference in the ancient readings, the authorities being somewhat equally divided between τοῦ Θεοῦ, *of God*, and τοῦ Κυρίου, *of the Lord*. Of course those who think the former reading theologically objectionable and improbable, will prefer the latter, which is adopted by Griesbach and Tischendorf; and in so doing they will feel confirmed by the testimony of Athanasius, the great champion of the Trinity, who says that "*the Scriptures have nowhere spoken of the blood of God apart from flesh, nor of God, apart from flesh, having suffered or risen*," συνδαμῶν δὲ αἷμα Θεοῦ δίχα σαρκὸς παραδεδώκασιν αἱ γραφαί, ἡ Θεὸν δίχα σαρκὸς παθόντα ἢ αναστάντα. I would not indeed say that these words of Athanasius are absolutely free from ambiguity, but I think that their only *good sense* supports our argument.

The notable verse in the First Epistle of John, speaking of *the three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit*, may be briefly disposed of by the statement, that by the judgment of the whole critical world it is declared to be a palpable forgery. The true reading runs thus: "*It is the spirit that beareth witness, because the spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness, the spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three are to one effect.*"\* The loss of this passage to the Trinitarian argument is certainly very

\* 1 John v. 6, 7.

great, because it was the single text in the whole Bible in which the term *three* appeared to be applied to the Deity. Now we may say, with undeniable truth, that never once, in any sense, does the Scripture speak of God as *three*.

Two or three other passages in which Christ seems to be called God, may be just mentioned. Matthew quotes from Isaiah the words, "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*"\* So our version has it; but more properly this name imports a short sentence, in effect, *With us is God*—μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός. Moreover, the maiden and the child here spoken of by the prophet, belonged plainly to his own day, and this prediction can be connected with Jesus merely in the way of accommodation.

In John's Epistle we read, "*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.*"† The italics here indicate to the instructed reader that the words, *of God*, are not in the original text; but nevertheless the popular ear hears them, and is deceived. The true reading is simply, "*Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us,*" meaning Christ.

In the Apocalypse, by an interpolation of the words, "*I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last,*"‡ in the mouth of Christ, taken in connection

\* Matt. vii. 23; Isaiah vii. 14. † 1 John iii. 16. ‡ Apoc. i. 11.

with a preceding verse, he is made, in effect, to declare himself *the Lord God Almighty*, whereas in truth it is God that speaks.

In the ninth chapter of Isaiah we read the words, "*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*"\* The reference of this passage to the Messiah at all is by no means certain; but at least it is proper to be known, that its rendering by the Seventy is very different. "*His name is called Messenger of the great counsel; for I will bring peace upon the rulers, and health to him.*" The words in our Hebrew also admit of several renderings.

In the Epistle to Titus we meet with these words: "*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*"† Many contend that Christ is here called both the great God and our Saviour, arguing from what appears to me an hypercritical nicety in the use of the Greek article. There is no dispute that, in strict grammatical propriety, the apostle should have written, τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ, καὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ*, just as in English it would be more correct to say, *I saw the king and the queen*, than *I saw the king and queen*. But then it is also beyond dispute,

\* Isaiah ix. 6.

† Titus ii. 13.

that these niceties were not always attended to by the Greeks, any more than by ourselves.

The words, "*In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*," in the Epistle to the Colossians,\* would seem to be not very properly translated; at least they admit of a different rendering. According to some of the best scholars, these words refer to the Church, which is here called the *complement, or fulness, of the Deity*, τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Θεότητος, and said to  *dwell in Christ as his body*, σωματικῶς; the meaning being, that the entire church of God is subjected to Christ as its head. This Pauline phraseology is certainly peculiar, and not easily represented in our own language; but it occurs in several parallel passages.

Thus, in the first chapter of this Epistle, it says: "*In him*, i.e. Christ, God *has been pleased that all the complement or fulness, πλήρωμα, should dwell*,"† meaning the Church; and in that to the Ephesians, that "*he hath given him as head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the complement, or fulness, πλήρωμα, of him who completeth all in all*,"‡ We may, therefore, understand the passage, "*In him dwelleth all the complement, or fulness, of the Deity bodily*," in the sense above explained. If, however, it should appear to any, that it speaks rather of the divine perfections dwelling in Christ, they should remember that the apostle applies the

\* Coloss. ii. 9.

† Coloss. i. 19.

‡ Ephes. i. 22.

same phrase to the Christian church in general, praying for them, "*that ye may be filled with or unto all the fulness of God;*"\* ἵνα πληρωθῇτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

There is a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, in our common version, seems to favour the doctrine of Christ's assumption of human nature. "*For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham*"—Οὐ γὰρ δέπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται, ἀλλὰ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ ἐπιλαμβάνεται. There is no question here that our present translation is quite wrong; the words, *the nature*, being gratuitously interpolated. It is the opinion of eminent scholars that the word ἐπιλαμβάνεται ought to be rendered, *he succoureth; as he succoureth not angels, but he succoureth the seed of Abraham*. But others prefer referring it to the *fear of death*, just before mentioned, rendering it thus: *For verily it, i.e. the fear of death, taketh not hold on angels, but it taketh hold on the seed of Abraham*. This version is the more literal, and seems to me the more interesting.†

In the same Epistle, there is another palpable error of translation, which is seriously misleading: "*Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*"‡ This rendering the original will not bear. The latter clause must be taken as

\* Ephes. iii. 19.

† Hebrews ii. 16.

‡ Hebrews xiii. 8.

a separate sentence: "*Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*" Our Lord's name stands here, as in many other places, for his religion, on the unchangeableness of which the apostle founds the ensuing precept: "*Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.*"

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, "*Neither let us tempt the Christ, as some of them also tempted.*"\* There is here about an equal weight of authority in favour of reading *τὸν Κύριον*, *the Lord*, instead of *τὸν Χριστόν*. But taking the passage as it stands, the idea seems to be, that Christ was, *in a figure*, tried or tempted by the Israelites in the spiritual Rock in Horeb which represented him, according to what is expressly stated just before: "*And that Rock was Christ.*"

In the same Epistle, instead of, "*The second man is the Lord from heaven,*"† we should read, "*The second man is of heaven,*" as it had been said before, that "*the first man was of the earth.*"

It now only remains to notice a few passages which, in opposition to the tenor of scriptural precept and example, are often appealed to in justification of *addressing prayer to Christ*.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul, referring to his thorn in the flesh, speaks thus: "*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me. And he said to me, My grace is*

\* 1 Cor. x. 9.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 47.



*sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly then will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*"\* Now let us admit, that in saying that he besought *the Lord*, the apostle means that he besought *Christ*, which is certainly my own opinion. Still it is obvious that this case differs from divine worship, because there is every reason to infer from the circumstances, that on the several occasions when the apostle preferred this petition, he was favoured with one of those special revelations of the Lord, of which he informs us that he had so many. It is the character of divine worship that it is addressed as to an *invisible and omnipresent* Being. In the present instance this character was absent.

The same remark will apply to the petition of the dying Stephen : "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;*" for just before, he had *looked up into heaven, and seen Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*†

There is also more than one passage in the New Testament in which mention is made of "*calling on Christ's name;*" and many contend that this phrase implies addressing him in prayer. The consideration of the passages will, however, shew that this is not necessarily, nor I think even probably, the case. Paul addresses his First Epistle to the Corinthians, "*to all that call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*"‡ Again, in the Acts,

\* 2 Cor. xii. 8.

† Acts vii. 60.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 2.

Ananias says of Saul, that "*he hath authority to bind all that call on thy name.*"\* And soon after, the same Ananias says to Paul, "*Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, having called upon his name.*"† Now in all these instances, I think it clear, that the sense most suitable to the writer's intention is not that of calling on the name of Christ in the way of prayer, but rather in that of *avowing* or *confessing* it, as that of his religious head or Lord. The force of the word *επικαλεῖσθαι* in such a connection, is not, I apprehend, so properly to *call upon a name*, as to *call a name upon oneself*; in other words, to *avow* or *profess* it, as a man does that of Christ, when he calls himself a Christian. We find the word used in the same sense in the passive form: Βλασφημοῦσι τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ επικληθὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς; "*they blaspheme the worthy name which is called upon you*;" that is, *by which ye are called.*‡

The passages which have now been noticed, should rather be taken as specimens of those which require correction in our Common Version of the Scripture, than as a complete list of them. All well-informed readers know, that that version, though truly venerable, and in the main excellent, yet stands much in need of revision. Above two centuries have passed since it was made, and during that interval immense advances have been made in every branch

\* Acts ix. 14.

† Acts xxii. 16.

‡ James ii. 7.

of ancient learning, and of biblical learning especially. Both in the original texts of the Scriptures, and the translations from them, numberless errors have been detected and amended. These errors have doubtless for the most part had an accidental origin. Still both their introduction and retention have evidently been favoured by prevailing opinions, which in the course of ages have not failed to give a certain bias and colouring to the sacred testimony, to an extent of which we shall probably never be fully aware. It is therefore most necessary that every one, who desires to attain a sound acquaintance with the sacred writings, should seek it in those improved editions and versions which modern scholarship has provided. If he can read the New Testament in the original Greek, he should furnish himself with the edition of *Griesbach*, or *Lachmann*, or *Tischendorf*; in the English he cannot perhaps at present use a better version than that of *Samuel Sharpe*. In this, though something is lost in style, as compared with our Authorized Version, much is gained in accuracy. On the whole, as regards the Trinitarian controversy, I think every candid scholar will admit, that our Common Version is not such as to enable any man to form a fair judgment on that subject.

Though studious of brevity, there is one consideration in favour of my present argument, which appears to me so powerful that I cannot omit it.

It is that of the *negative evidence* which the Scripture affords in its support. Let it only be considered, that *in the three first Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, there is not a single passage in which either the Deity or pre-existence of Christ can, with any appearance of reason, be pretended to be mentioned.* Nothing occurs from which we should be led to view him in any other light than that in which Peter represented him on the day of Pentecost, "*a man approved of God, by signs and wonders, which God did by him in the midst of us.*" Now I ask, is it possible that three of his best-informed followers, expressly undertaking to write formal memorials of his life and doctrine, and one of them a further account of the acts of his apostles after his death, should all have failed to take notice of so essential and astonishing a fact, as that he had positively declared himself to be, not simply a man, as he appeared to be, but in very deed the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, actually descended from heaven and dwelling personally among men, had such really been the case? Is it *safe* to insinuate, as has been done, that the three first evangelists confined themselves advisedly to his humanity, suppressing thus, as far as in them lay, the announcement of their Lord's real nature and glory, even after he had himself expressly declared them? I say, if these Christian memorialists, undertaking, as they do, to give the Church sufficient accounts of

their Master's life and discourses, have indeed left us narratives so miserably defective as this would imply, farewell to the credibility of the Gospel history! Such writings, in the judgment of all impartial critics, will be esteemed destitute of good faith; at least either they, or the fourth evangelist, must be discarded as unworthy of credit. But happily for our faith, we see no reason to admit that John is really so much at variance with his fellow-memorialists. Some peculiarities, both of thought and style, the fourth Gospel doubtless exhibits, and some variations from the others in its narrative; but not, as we believe, any such substantial inconsistency with them, either as to facts or doctrines, as to invalidate either their general credibility, or its own. We believe that it has been only through error, that the doctrine either of the Deity or personal pre-existence of Christ has been supposed to be found in it: and I think that this remark holds equally good of the whole of the New Testament. The passages which are brought to prove these doctrines, are either corrupt readings of the original text, or mistranslations, or at most ambiguous phrases, which will bear another interpretation.

If these new and most astounding doctrines had really been a part of the gospel, the apostles would assuredly have enforced them, in statements as plain and explicit as language could supply; and insisted

on them with that pointedness and frequency which their novelty, importance and apparent difficulty would have demanded. That they have done nothing of the kind, is the best possible proof that they were entirely unacquainted with them, and that those who now fancy that they discover them in some obscure or equivocal expressions which occur here and there in their writings, are labouring under a great error.

Moreover, if such doctrines had really been preached by Christ and the apostles, they must inevitably have excited, from the first, much opposition and controversy. Is it conceivable, that those dogmas which, in all after ages of the Church, have been the subjects of never-ending contention,—the establishing of which has been the chief labour of its councils and creeds, and the maintaining of which the chief source of its intestine wars and persecutions, and of all the outcry against heresy,—could have been promulgated in the first age, when they were quite new and strange, with as little noise as the most obvious truism? Were there no Pharisees, no Judaizing teachers, no puzzled and inquiring converts, to give the apostles any trouble, or call from them any explanations, on these points? We can only say, that no trace of anything of this kind appears in the New Testament. In regard to these questions, all appears as calm and quiet as a summer's day. The world received the announce-

ment, that God Almighty had in person come down from heaven, lived some thirty years on earth in a human form ; eaten, drunk and slept, worked as a carpenter, and gone in and out, like any common man ; and finally been crucified as a malefactor, without deeming the matter worthy of any particular notice ! It was not till above a hundred years later that the story began to excite attention ! And then it was immediately called in question, and only partially believed ! After two centuries more its credit became established !

With such a notable lack of authentic evidence to support it, it may be wondered to what causes the persistent belief in the Trinitarian doctrine is to be ascribed. Without undertaking a formal inquiry into this question, I offer a few suggestions which appear to me to throw some light on it.

In the first place, it is to be considered that the minds of men are naturally *fond of the marvellous and mystical*. The story of a great celestial Being coming down from heaven, and living among men in a human form, with all the attendant circumstances of the evangelic narrative, however repugnant to calm reason, is yet highly adapted to gratify this propensity. It makes a religious romance of a very imposing kind, and quite fitted to enthrall a numerous order of minds.

And in natural connection with this love of the *marvellous*, there is found a *proneness to idolatry*.

Unable to apprehend the spiritual essence of the Deity, men have been willing to bring him more to the level of their own conceptions and sympathies by supposing him visible under some bodily form. They have seen him in the orbs of heaven, or wearing the shape of certain living animals; but especially have they delighted in anthropomorphic worship, deifying for this purpose heroes of the human race. It is evident, that in investing Jesus Christ with divine attributes, and making him an object of divine worship, the lately converted Pagan nations found a welcome relief from the severe simplicity of the Hebrew monotheism. And once entering on this course, the Church soon made herself ample amends for her temporary abstinence from the festive rites of polytheism, in the worship, together with that of the Trinity, of the Virgin Mother of God, and a host of canonized saints. Though in part smitten down by the iconoclasts of the sixteenth century, this worship still largely survives; the causes which gave it birth, having doubtless continued to maintain it to this day.

With these causes has conspired the *sense of guilt in men's breasts, alarming them with vague and superstitious fears of the Divine justice*. Imagining God to be such a one as themselves, they have conceived that he must be appeased by some expiatory sacrifice commensurate with his majesty and their own infinite demerits. Their clouded and guilty minds



could not rise to the conception of his paternal love. They did not apprehend that he punishes, not to avenge, but to correct. And these misconceptions still prevail. Men still cling to the idea of an infinite atonement effected by a penal sacrifice of infinite value ; and only in a suffering, dying God can they find this atonement. In this belief alone they find peace. They rejoice thus to escape from the justice of their Maker, little thinking what is implied in the fact of such a mode of escape being necessary.

Among the causes which have sustained reputed orthodoxy, it can hardly be doubted that one has been the *interest which the priesthood has had in it*. It is obvious enough, how much such a system of awful mysteries and terrors, confounding reason and filling the soul with dread, has tended to subject the laity to the clergy, and even the body of the clergy themselves to the supreme heads of the hierarchy. If, then, these spiritual teachers and rulers of Israel have been men accessible to the ordinary motives of covetousness and ambition, it is plain that they have had a strong inducement to sustain with all their influence a theology so profitable to themselves. The authority of the priesthood is a formidable power, and with many minds almost omnipotent.

Lastly, we have to consider the force of *prejudice*—*prejudice* imbibed in infancy, and confirmed by

the almost universal belief of all around us in our riper years. Prejudice is at all times a strong power; but how much more so when it relates to matters so lofty, so mysterious, so awful, as these! The antagonist of prejudice is reason. But here reason has been silenced and stupefied by oppressive authority and superstitious dread. How unequal, in such a case, will be the contest between her light and the mists of prejudice!

But what if, as is probable, the strongest ally of prejudice should be piety itself? In this controversy, piety often thinks and feels that nothing less is attacked than the honour of the beloved Lord and Saviour, who redeemed us to God by his blood. Who would not shrink from wounding such a prejudice! How painful is the duty of assailing it, even in the cause of truth! Yet there is one reflection which might have weight. Is it *pleasing* to the Lord Jesus to receive the divine honours which the orthodox Church pays him, and in which she exalts him to an equality with Him whom he acknowledged as his Father and his God? The answer to this question must be sought in perusing the gospel history.

I think that the foregoing considerations are sufficient to explain, in some good measure, the tenacity with which the popular theology is retained. But the errors of ages require ages for their removal. In God's good time the Truth will prevail; "*with him a thousand years are as one day.*"

## CHAPTER XII.

## TRINITARIAN DIFFICULTIES.

I HAVE known some to whom it has seemed impossible to believe the doctrine of the Trinity to be untrue, because they could not believe that God would have suffered so great an error to overrun the Church so long and so extensively, and especially to obscure the faith of so many pious minds. But it becomes us not to imagine what the Most High would or would not do ; but rather to consider, by the light of history, what He actually has done. For how many centuries was not nearly the whole Church involved in all the errors of Popery ? The Reformation, even to this day, has had but a partial diffusion, and by far the larger part of Christendom is still infested with the manifold corruptions of the Greek and Roman Churches. Yet candour must admit, what is an undoubted fact, that multitudes of persons as pious and devoted as any among Protestants, have lived and died in those communions, and even been zealously tenacious of their errors. Among Protestants themselves, how many men of deep piety and fervent prayer, have eagerly contended for the most opposite opinions ! It is clear, then, that in numberless instances, the order of Providence has not, in fact, preserved either the

Church at large, or its most pious members, from gross delusions ; and there is therefore no sufficient ground for assuming that it must have done so in the instance in question. Is not a great and general apostasy of the Church the burden of New Testament prophecy ? Shall we then, when we see the actual existence of this apostasy plainly before us, turn round and say, that it is impossible that God can have suffered such a thing to happen ? Let us be more diffident of our own judgment respecting the ways of Heaven. And why should we be anxious about this matter ? As regards all sincerely pious individuals, we believe their salvation to have been secure, whatever may have been the errors of their creed ; and if this be admitted, it is sufficient to justify the ways of God, and set our minds at rest.

There is, however, great reason for suspecting, that of those who profess themselves Trinitarians, and even imagine that they are so, a great proportion do not really believe in that doctrine. Indeed, if we are right in asserting that this doctrine essentially involves a contradiction in terms, it will inevitably follow, that reflecting persons, who cannot be contented to be habitually babbling a solemn jargon, will endeavour to extricate themselves from the dilemma, by secretly explaining away either the one or the other of its incompatible clauses. The result will be, that, in the language of their creed, they

will either *confound the persons, or divide the substance*; for the path of orthodoxy is here as difficult to tread as the fabulous razor-edged bridge of Padalon.

The difficulty, if not impossibility, of successfully treading this way, is well illustrated by the notable controversy respecting the Trinity which arose among the divines of the Church of England in the reign of King William the Third. The opinion of one party, coinciding doubtless with that which, at all times, is most popular, consisted in a fair and open belief in *three divine persons, or intelligent agents*, jointly, by unity of counsel and operation, *constituting one Godhead*, in the same way as many individual statesmen may constitute one government. This view of the Trinity was maintained, among others, by Dr. *Sherlock*; but it was pronounced by his opponents to be a dividing of the divine *ousia*, substance or being, and tantamount to holding *three Gods*.

The other view of the doctrine, which has sometimes been called *the modal*, regards the divine hypostases not, properly speaking, as distinct *persons*, in the ordinary sense of that word, but only as distinct *powers* existing in the Divine nature, or as distinct *characters, or aspects*, which the Deity bears toward his creatures. This modal scheme was warmly maintained, among others, by Professor *Wallis*, of Oxford, and the courtly Dr. *South*. "A

*divine person*," Dr. Wallis observes, "is only a *mode*, or *respect*, or *relation*, of God to his creatures. He beareth to his creatures these three relations, that He was their *Creator*, their *Redeemer*, and their *Sanctifier*. This is what we mean, and all that we mean, when we say that God is three persons. He hath these three relations to his creatures ; and is thereby no more three Gods, than he was so to the Jews, because he calleth himself, '*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*.'"

Dr. South explains himself to the same effect,—that is, of utterly confounding the persons,—though in a somewhat different manner. "We may represent to ourselves," he says, "an infinite rational mind, which, considered under the first and original perfection of *being* or *existence*, may be called *the Father*, inasmuch as the perfection of existence is the first, and productive of all the others. Secondly, in the same infinite mind may be considered the perfection of *understanding*, as being the first great perfection that issues from the perfection of existence, and so may be called *the Son*, who is also called *the Word*, as being the first emanation of that infinite mind. And then, thirdly, when that infinite mind, by its understanding, reflects upon its own essential perfections, there cannot but ensue an act of *volition*, and complacency in those perfections, arising from such an intellectual reflection upon them, which may be called *the Holy Ghost*,

who therefore is said to proceed both from the Father and the Son.”\*

It must be admitted that this modal Trinitarianism is fairly clear from the charge of polytheism. It maintains very well the Divine unity; but it reduces the *tri-personality* to a quibble, a nullity. However, it must be noticed, that when this controversy began to disturb the church, the University of Oxford, no bad judges of orthodoxy, assembled to consider the question; and the result was a formal condemnation of Dr. Sherlock's doctrine of a plurality of divine minds, as impious and heretical. The Royal authority soon after interfered, and forbade the introduction of any innovation in this matter. Each of these parties, therefore, remains equally free to hold its own, and the doctrine of the Trinity may, I presume, be legally held by Churchmen with such latitude as would include both these opinions, provided they continue in the use of the orthodox phraseology.

In what proportion the Trinitarian world is divided between these two opinions, or to what extent it may have devised some *tertium quid* between them, it would not be easy to ascertain. A prudent reticence on the subject appears at present to be the preferred way. All attempts to attain clear and rational ideas seem to be abandoned; the prescribed formulas are duly recited; and the

\* Sermon on the Trinity.

highest good is to keep the two antagonist and irreconcilable dogmas of *one God* and *three Divine Persons* slumbering together, side by side, in the mind.

Stepping out of the pale of the Establishment, I shall here subjoin an extract from that truly eminent divine, Dr. *Isaac Watts*, by which it will appear how little of a real Trinity was retained by him. After acknowledging that a considerable change had taken place in his opinions, and that he had seen reason to relinquish doctrinal views which he had formerly entertained, he proceeds to explain those at which he had more lately arrived, in this manner, which does not differ materially from that of South: "As the chief faculties," he says, "of our souls are the mind and the will, or rather a power of knowing and a power of acting, so God seems to have revealed himself to us as endued with two divine faculties, his *word* or *wisdom*, and his *spirit* or *efficient power*. It is by this Word and this Spirit that he is represented in Scripture as managing the great concerns of creation, providence, redemption and salvation; and these three, viz., God the Father, his Word, and his Spirit, are held forth to us in Scripture as one God, even as the soul of man, his mind and his will, are one spiritual being. Since reason and scripture agree to teach us the nature of God, and inform us



who and what God is by this analogy, I think, in our inquiries on this subject, we ought to follow this analogy as far as reason and scripture allow us. Now it is evident, that a human soul, in its nature, is *one conscious mind*; and it is utterly inconsistent with the nature of it to have two or three distinct conscious principles, or natures, in it; that is, to include two or three different conscious beings. And since we are told that *God is one*, and *God is a Spirit*, it would be something strange if we must believe that God is two or three spirits. If there be some distinctions, or differences, in the Divine nature, greater than that of relations, modes or attributes, and less than that of substances, I know not what name to give it better than that of *divine powers*. Let us therefore suppose the great and blessed God to be one infinite Spirit, one conscious Being, who possesses real distinct or different powers, which in sacred language are called the Word and the Spirit. And though this distinction be not so great as to allow of different consciousnesses, so as to make distinct Spirits, yet these two powers may be represented in Scripture, *in a figurative manner*, under *distinct personal characters*. Why may not God be represented as a Person transacting his own divine affairs with his Word and his Spirit under personal characters, since a man is often represented as transacting human

affairs with his understanding, mind, will, reason, fancy, or conscience, in a personal manner?\*

Excellently well, dear Doctor. The strictest monotheists could find no offence in such a Trinity, except for the terrible absurdity of propounding with so much solemn ado, and as such an incomprehensible mystery, the very simple and undisputed truth, that Almighty God is endowed both with understanding and will; or, if it be preferred, with his word and his spirit. What need to trumpet forth these modest truisms in the lofty style of "*the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God*;" or in the pompous paradoxes of the Athanasian Creed?

But it may be asked, if the doctrine of the Trinity may be held in a form in which the most strictly monotheistic Christians see so little to object to, why do these persons feel obliged to separate from the worship of the national Establishment, and to make such an outcry about the prevailing corruptions of Christianity? The answer is simple. It is, that this modal or scholastic Trinity, however convenient for the purposes of controversy, has *no living reality*: it neither is, nor can be, a true expression of what is taught and believed in the Church on this subject. The Church not only teaches the tri-personality of the Deity, but the *Deity of Jesus Christ*. Now it is idle to declare

\* Arian invited to Orthodox Faith.

that the Deity is but one single Being, one conscious Mind, if at the same it is inculcated that Jesus Christ is included in it, being really and perfectly God. Will any one, in his sober senses, say that Jesus and the Father are represented in the New Testament as one and the same conscious Mind, or one and the same individual Being? But if not, then they who ascribe deity both to the Father and to Christ, ascribe deity to two distinct individual beings, to two distinct conscious minds, which by general confession is to make *two Gods*. Here are two divine *persons*, not in any figurative sense, but in the plain common sense of the term,—the only sense which is popularly intelligible.

Thus, after all the ingenuity that has been displayed in refining away the doctrine of the Trinity, and with seeming success while that doctrine was contemplated only in relation to the eternal essence of the Deity, the more untractable doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ disperses this illusion of a shadowy monotheism, and brings us back to a plain and practical polytheism. The metaphysical abstraction of the Trinity we could easily dispose of; but when the Church plainly declares that Jesus Christ is Almighty God, without reserve or qualification, equal with the Father, and also the Creator of the world,—and when she requires us to join in addressing to him that religious worship which is confessedly due only to the Supreme,—then cer-

tainly we are scandalized. The little schemes of conformity in which we willingly indulged, and which we were patching up by aid of the modal Trinity, are shattered at a blow; and we are obliged, though reluctantly, to secede from a worship which *we* cannot distinguish from polytheism and idolatry.

Seeing, then, herein the point where we essentially differ from the Church of England, we may discern also the necessary terms of re-union, should there ever be a disposition to offer any. If the Church, instead of ascribing to the Lord Jesus a proper deity as a thing belonging to his own nature, were satisfied in declaring, in scriptural terms, his mysterious union with the Father,—and if, instead of calling us to address divine worship directly to the Son, it called us only to worship the Father in the Son's name, which is surely the scriptural practice,—then, I think, the chief causes of our schism would be removed. It is possible that the time may come, when the rulers of that venerable institution, disgusted by fanaticism and formalism within, and alarmed by hostility without, may be disposed to make such concessions to honest scruples; and in so doing, may make sincere and enlightened friends of a now much wronged and alienated body of Christian believers.

Beside the above-mentioned sources of dissension inherent in the Trinitarian doctrine, we learn from history that in former ages there were unfolded

various others, which, though at length trampled down by the stern force of authority, proved in their day very formidable troubles to the Church. Among these were the subtle and insoluble questions raised by the so-called heresies of the *Monophysites* and *Monothelites* in the fifth and seventh centuries. These parties taught that, in the person of Christ, the divine and human natures, and the divine and human wills, were no longer distinct, but blended into one. Hence arose controversies extensive and violent, and hardly suppressed by the authority of the general councils of Chalcedon and Constantinople, which established for orthodoxy the doctrine that in Christ there were both *two natures* and *two wills*. But how hard to distinguish between this and two *persons*! And how easily might the embers of such controversies be rekindled!

If we could regard the doctrine of the Trinity as merely a speculative error, the reason for contending against it would be less grave than it now appears to us. But we cannot doubt that there is an immense and incalculable evil, in binding up with our religious belief any doctrine which is essentially shocking to reason. For this goes to divorce religion from science and philosophy, and to set it in opposition to intellectual progress of every kind; a state of things which naturally issues in scepticism and unbelief on one hand, and in bigotry, intolerance and persecution on the other. The history

of the Church abundantly proves to how much mischief of this kind the dogma of the Trinity has actually given occasion.

In Christian theology, too, this dogma has been the element which has leavened the whole mass, with all that is most gloomy, stern and repulsive. It is on the doctrine of the deity of Christ that has been suspended that chain of horrors—*inexorable justice, infinite guilt, infinite satisfaction, vicarious punishment*, or, failing that, *eternal torments*. It seems to be apprehended that all these things hang together in a logical sequence of indissoluble coherence.

History has made us acquainted with many systems of religion, which in different ages and nations have prevailed among men. But it appears doubtful whether, among them all, there be one which invests the character and government of God with attributes so gloomy and terrific, or places his rational creatures in a situation so profoundly pitiable and melancholy, as does this professedly orthodox scheme of Christian theology. Such, at least, is the impression which it makes on many reflecting minds.

As regards our future destiny, if we turn to the Scripture, I think it may most truly be said, that the dreadful dogma of absolutely never-ending misery, as the punishment of human sin, is never asserted there. It has long been observed that the

use of the Greek word *αἰώνιος*, on which this doctrine is founded, admits much latitude. *Αἰών* does not properly signify *eternity*. Its literal meaning is *an age, a life, any long indefinite duration*; as when *the hills* are called *everlasting*; or when it is said that *the earth abideth for ever*. *Κόλασις αἰωνία*,\* therefore, *aiownial punishment*, paraphrased literally, is *punishment of ages*. Solemn terms, doubtless, and meant to be so; and to impress on our minds the most awful sense of the consequences of unrepented and persevering sin. Yet their import is indefinite. They convey only the idea of a retribution, whose duration, as well as nature, is among those secrets of eternity which God reserves to himself.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### OUR POSITION AND PROSPECTS.

I OBSERVED that it was an unfortunate consequence of the prevailing theology, that it made a breach between religion and reason. Not less is it a happiness attending true monotheistic Christianity, that it maintains, in all points, a close alliance with reason. Sometimes, indeed, it is taunted

\* Matt. xxv. 46.

with being little better than mere natural religion, adding only some further assurance of the doctrine of a future life. It accepts this charge, and counts it for glory. If natural religion is that knowledge and adoration of God which may be learnt from contemplation of the glorious universe around us, and the light of the divine spirit shining within our souls, then it is indeed the highest and best religion that we can have. And if, beside what nature can teach, some signs have been given us which carry forward our hopes beyond the present life into another sphere of being, that is better for us still, and we hail it with joy and thankfulness. It brings a glorious confirmation of that trust in God and goodness, with which the light of nature had already inspired us.

It is therefore the boast of our *Free Christian Churches*, that while they receive the religious teaching of the Scripture as the basis of their faith and practice, they at the same time hold it to be their privilege and duty to exercise perfect freedom of thought on all questions to which the rational faculties of man can extend. And this embraces not only history and criticism, science and philosophy, but likewise ethics and theology. In everything they disclaim *dogma*. Their watchword is **FREEDOM AND CATHOLICITY**. They wish to unshackle their minds from all fetters of authority and prejudice, and to seek impartially and sincerely

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the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. They feel assured that to Him who is "*the God of truth, and who desireth truth in the inward part,*" no service will be more acceptable than this; and that, on the other hand, nothing will more surely be offensive to Him than to bring before Him any sort of falsehood or hypocrisy. For this cannot be less than an insult to his holiness and omniscience.

Our churches, therefore, while they profess themselves Christian believers, think it also their duty to be thorough truth-seekers; deeming themselves, like the apostle, *not to have already attained, neither to be already perfect*. And they are satisfied that the surest road to truth is free, fearless, honest inquiry, in dependence on the blessing of God. And why should we doubt of his approval in this course? Very remarkable are some passages of Scripture, in which a strict impartiality is commended to us, even in regard to God himself. So Job sublimely exclaims, "*Will ye plead unjustly for God? Will ye accept his person?*"\* And Paul, as if speaking of something most dreadful, says: "*Then we shall even be found false witnesses concerning God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if the dead rise not.*"† So vain it is to think to honour the Most High by any pious falsehoods or frauds.

\* Job xiii. 7.

† 1 Cor. xv. 15.

So far as can be judged from the tendencies of modern thought, and the yearly accruing results of critical and historical investigation, there seems reason to expect that in the *Church of the Future*, the emancipation of religion from dogmatical authority, and its reconciliation with reason and philosophy, will become more and more complete. Among other results of this progress, one will probably be, that all such religious doctrines as rest solely on the authority of texts, especially if those texts be in any degree questionable either as to their genuineness or interpretation, will lose that place in public belief which they now enjoy. And the residue of religious doctrine, which shall survive this cleansing of the grain from the chaff, what will it be? *We* think that it will hardly fail to correspond pretty nearly with that pure and simple monotheistic Christianity which has been the subject of the foregoing pages.

In what manner this approaching change will be brought to pass—whether through the separate growth of strictly monotheistic churches, or through the gradual diffusion of monotheistic views among other churches—we cannot yet discern: probably in both ways. But, in either case, the abandonment of dogmatism is the essential pre-requisite. The work would seem especially to belong to Free Christian Churches—such as aim at avoiding scandals and divisions, and rendering a general unity pos-

sible, by professing only what is catholic in Christianity, and leaving the rest to private opinion.

The most difficult problem which such churches have to solve, appears to be that of reconciling perfect freedom of religious thought with the profession of Christianity. In fact, it must be admitted, that to enlightened minds such a conjunction is possible, only so far as they shall actually have found, in the religious teaching of the New Testament, a system which in the main their deliberate judgment has approved ; and it can be maintained only so long as such approval shall last.

And what shall be the understanding between such congregations and their ministers ? Shall it involve a dogmatic test ? Impossible. But in the absence of that, ought the ministers to feel at liberty, notwithstanding the scandal and grief which they may cause to many of the members, to insist on every private opinion which they may happen to have embraced ? That would be neither edifying nor conservative of union. What then ? Might not the understanding be something of this kind ? That the minister, *at his discretion*, shall be free to state his private views, *as such*, on all questions, so far as he shall deem that a *conscientious frankness requires him to do so* ; but that, *beyond that*, he shall avoid insisting on opinions at variance with the admitted teaching of the scriptural canon, *unless* such opinions shall *already have been generally re-*

*ceived among well-informed persons.* An understanding of this kind would always leave the Christian ministry free to follow the progress of science and philosophy in all branches, and would only check unseasonable obtrusions on the Church of crude and disputable speculations of individuals. It would also seem to indicate that limit to the advocacy of private opinion on the part of the preacher, which is due to the corresponding right of private judgment on the part of the people. With the exercise of mutual forbearance and moderation, it does not appear too much to hope that the principle here recommended, might afford to Christian churches a basis of union, combined with freedom, at present much needed.

If the reader should have been previously unacquainted with the principles of strictly monotheistic Christians, he may perhaps wonder at the account here given of a system which he probably has heard furiously decried. Here, if anywhere, he finds himself directed to *believe in the Father as the only true God, and in Jesus Christ as in him whom he has sent,\** which is declared to be *life eternal*; and to place religion in the sincere *love of God and man*, which is declared to be the *fulfilling of the law*. The whole system is rational and cheerful. No awful and confounding mysteries are made of the two simple rites of primitive Christianity; the one

\* John xvii. 3.

*initiative*, the other *commemorative* ; nor of the pleasing and probable doctrine of the *spiritual restoration of the body* in a future state. The solemn blunder of *Christian fatalism*, and the *Satanic dualism* challenging the Divine sovereignty, have no place here. The character and government of God are everywhere represented as *paternal*, and the terrorism of the popular theology disappears. Even the awful subject of *future punishment* is penetrated by bright beams of equity and love, which flash a gleam of hope through the darkness of despair. Yet are there here no doctrines which even seem to favour licentiousness, nor any which cherish spiritual pride or fanatical eccentricity. The great fundamental truth, that God will render to all men according to their works, is ever at hand to check delusion and presumption.

Moreover, if we turn from the doctrine to the personal character of this class of Christians, we find the general testimony to be in their favour. As a body, they cannot be charged either with irreligious profligacy or self-righteous separatism. No candid person will deny that there are among them many respectable and upright people, who, without vaunting themselves or condemning others, endeavour to keep the precepts of Jesus. If they are neither so rigid nor so zealous, in their religion, as some others are, it is because they take a different view of the genius of Christianity and the nature

of acceptable piety; believing, with the apostle, that "*God is no respecter of persons, but that in every sect and nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.*"\* They cultivate a devout submission and cheerful thankfulness towards the Disposer of all things, with a firm assurance of his infinite benevolence; and wish to live in the exercise of candour and goodwill toward all their fellow-mortals. They believe that so to act is most truly to follow Christ, and to be worthy to bear his name. Bound together by common sentiments and a common reproach, they are yet as little tinctured with the illiberality of party-spirit as perhaps any other sect. Warmly attached to the principles of civil and religious liberty, they have ever been found among the most devoted partisans of that sacred cause. Exceptions to these remarks, in the case of individuals, may of course be met with; but of the characteristic and prevailing spirit of the worshippers of *one God the Father*, I believe the foregoing to be a fair account.

In proof of their long-known fairness and candour in conducting religious controversy, I will now request the reader's attention to the following passage of the amiable prelate *Tillotson*. It is taken from one of his sermons on the *Divinity of Christ*, in which, while contending against the Unitarian doctrine, he yet bestows a generous tribute of praise

\* Acts x. 34.

on the motives and temper of its defenders. Such concessions are among "*the things which make for peace, and by which we may edify one another.*" "To do right," he says, "to the writers on that side, I must own that generally they are a pattern of the fair way of disputing and debating matters of religion, without heat and unseemly reflection on their adversaries. They generally argue matters with that temper and gravity, and with that freedom from passion and transport, which becomes a serious and weighty argument. And, for the most part, they reason closely and clearly, with extraordinary guard and caution, with great dexterity and decency, and yet with smartness and subtlety enough; with a very gentle heat and few hard words;—virtues to be praised wherever they are found, yea, even in an enemy, and very worthy our imitation. In a word, they are the strongest managers of a weak cause, and which is ill founded at the bottom, that perhaps ever yet meddled with controversy." So far the Archbishop. But here, may we not ask, whether it is likely that, without any interested motives, the best reasoners would thus engage themselves for the worse cause? Is it not more likely that it was the *cause of truth* which made fair and candid reasoners, as it commonly does?

In the days of the Son of Man, the bitterest enemies of the gospel were found among the adherents of a sect which, at that time, was the most

prominent and zealous in religious profession. And, in the present day, it appears to me that we meet with some persons who think themselves very religious, and are thought so by others, but who, in this circumstance and in several besides, not a little resemble the Pharisees of old. Like them, they seem unable to conceive that any are accepted of God, save those whose religious views correspond with their own. And it matters little whether they fancy their righteousness to be of faith or of works, or whether they call it personal or imputed, if, like those Pharisees, they do, in effect, "*trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise or undervalue others.*" Like them, too, they lay a vast stress on orthodoxy of religious doctrine and on strictness in religious observances. Their prayers, like theirs, are frequent, long and public; their zeal in making proselytes far and near, is, like theirs, indefatigable. But too often, with all this religiousness and zeal for God, they would seem to be obnoxious to the same censure with which Christ reproved those ancient religionists: "*Ye pay tithes of the mint and the anise and the cummin, but ye have neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.*"\* Though rigid in religious duties, they are often far from exemplary in the social virtues; at least it is too evident that their zeal outruns their charity.

\* Matt. xxiii. 23.



People of this kind, strongly prejudiced against liberal Christians, as were the Pharisees of old against the more free-thinking Sadducees, have told them without reserve that religion, such as theirs, is worthless, and even impious. They deny them the Christian name, refuse them religious, and in many instances even social, fellowship; call them enemies of Christ, deniers of the Lord that bought them, and, in short, do all they can *to cast out their names as evil*; and not without some success.

When a doctrine is denounced as *heretical*, this alone is enough to frighten many minds, not only from embracing it, but even from examining the subject. But in regard to this charge, it will be well to remember that the word *hairesis*, or *heresy*, is simply equivalent to the word *sect*, and that to call a doctrine *heretical* is no more, according to the proper and scriptural use of the term, than to say that it is *sectarian*. How far this will imply anything blameable will depend on circumstances. The orator Tertullus charged the apostle Paul with being *a ringleader of the heresy of the Nazarenes*. But the apostle, in reply, confessed without shame, "*that after the way which they called a heresy, so worshipped he the God of his fathers.*"\* It is in adopting this confession that we apologize for ourselves. A heresy is blameable only so far as it wilfully departs from the truth, or rashly trans-

\* Acts xxiv. 14.

gresses the rule of faith. In this predicament honest and reverent inquirers after truth can never really be found. And, verily, I do believe that whether they chance to err or not in their opinions, still such inquirers are, in that character, more pleasing to God than a multitude of indolent and superstitious believers who inquire about nothing.

Let it also be remembered that this cry of heresy is one which, in every age of the Church, has always been in the mouths of the enemies of religious freedom and improvement. The best of men, the greatest benefactors of their race, have suffered this reproach—from the apostles of Christ down to the martyrs of the Reformation, and to still later days. But, if the doctrine of the *sole Deity of the Father* be indeed heretical, its opponents must admit that this heresy was the earliest on the list, and sprang up in the very footsteps of the apostles. To us, however, it appears that it is the Trinitarian doctrine which is indeed the heresy, if such hard names must be used, as being an innovation on that of the apostles, and plainly at variance with the canonical phraseology of the Christian faith. We find the origin of this doctrine in the dreamy sophistries of the Neoplatonists and Alexandrian Jews before the time of Christ; and we trace its growth in the Church from the first modest insinuation of it by Justin Martyr, and the mystical speculations on the Logos of the early Fathers, down to the audacious

decisions of the Councils of the fourth and following centuries. It was then, when the Church was already deep sunk in corruption of every kind, that by violence and intrigue, such as would disgrace in our own days a borough election, this doctrine was at length carried by vote, in a tumultuous assembly, and imposed on the faith of Christendom on pain of excommunication and other grievous penalties. My limits forbid my pursuing this interesting though painful theme, but I may refer the reader to the works of *Lardner*, especially his excellent *Letter on the Logos*; to *Priestley's History of Early Opinions*; and to the writings of *Milman*, *Jowett*, *Yates*, *Martineau*, *Carpenter*, *Channing*, and many other authors of recent date.

The writer has now fulfilled his proposed task, and exhibited, to the best of his ability, and agreeably to his long-formed convictions, a clear and sufficient vindication of the *strict and proper Monotheism of Christianity*, as taught in the New Testament. It will now remain with the reader, as he loves the truth of God and desires to be found faithful, to judge impartially whether this doctrine is agreeable to the Scriptures and to right reason, or whether it is not. But, assuming the former alternative, one practical question remains which must be briefly noticed. It is that of *conformity* or *nonconformity*.

The churches among us where the Father is

worshipped as the only true God, are comparatively few and far between; the congregations, too, are generally small, while not many of the mighty, rich and noble ones of the land, are to be found in them. We are, moreover, undeniably "*a sect which is everywhere spoken against.*" For the most part, therefore, it is not without considerable sacrifice of worldly interest and social position, that a man can choose his lot among us. Plainly, then, it behoves him, before doing so, to count the cost; and unless he love truth above all things, he would better forbear. Nor will he find any lack of plausible arguments by which he may persuade himself, that the path which, in this case, will undoubtedly appear the most agreeable, is also that of wisdom,—nay, of duty. Unless, then, he feel that all such considerations are outweighed in his mind by the single reflection, that the question at issue is no less than *whether he shall worship one God or three*—the eternal Maker and Father of the universe, or a deified human being—he will do best to stay away from our chapels, and go to church with the great and the many. He may fortify himself in this course by remembering *Bacon's* confession: "*That in matters of religion he had always judged it best to follow the great wheel of the Church;*" or the homelier maxim which bids us, "*think with the wise, and act with the vulgar.*"

No doubt, history tells us, that about two hundred

years ago, some two thousand English clergymen were so tender in conscience, that on account of certain points which now appear to us of very minor importance, such as the use of the ring in marriage and the sign of the cross in baptism, they forsook their livings and resigned themselves to poverty and persecution. But some may think that these good men were over-scrupulous, and that men's ideas at the present day are more enlarged and liberal. People may even be of opinion that a regard to interest, or convenience, or gentility, and the natural preference of worshipping with a large and well-dressed assembly, are grounds sufficient to justify them in violating the first and greatest commandment both of the law and the gospel. Those holy confessors may have been only weak-minded Puritans. The noble army of martyrs, from first to last, may have been mistaken enthusiasts. But let us remember that *God is the judge; and let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

Some pious and intelligent people appear to be overawed by the claims of ecclesiastical authority, and an imagined obligation to conformity and subordination. Confessedly, in their place, these things deserve consideration; but that place is not the *first* place. Our first regard is due to God and to the Truth; and if, through deference to any human *authority*, or conciliation of any human fellowship,

we be unfaithful to this duty, we shall be guilty of a very grave error. The devices and ambition of the priesthood are not unknown. We must take heed that we do not worship the Church before the God of the Church, or sacrifice to unity rather than to truth.

The true unity of the Christian Church is *not hierarchical, but spiritual*; "*the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*" Jesus claimed to be his Church's only Lord and Head. He said to his disciples, "*Call no man your Master on earth; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.*" A more pernicious and frightful delusion was never conceived, than that of the Church being an hierarchy, founded on coercive authority, like the kingdoms of this world, rising, rank above rank, to one supreme earthly and visible head, whose pretension is to be the vicar of Christ and spiritual autocrat of the whole human race. The baleful fruits of the audacious and too successful attempt which has been made to realize this project, are matter of history. It is the history, as I believe, of the unfolding of the prophetic *apostasy* and *man of sin*; and this will not be ended till the freedom and equality of Christian brotherhood in the Church be restored.

And now may He who is the patron of truth, prosper the truth, with whomsoever it be found,—yea, by his matchless providence, may he so overrule even the mistakes of such of us as may un-

wittingly be pleading for error, that in the end "we may be found to have done *nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.*"

These pages are not written in the spirit of controversy, into which it is far from the author's purpose to enter. His highest aim will be answered if his feeble attempt shall prove, in any degree, subservient to the promotion of charity and goodwill. *For the end of the commandment, the substance of the law, the prophets and the gospel, is LOVE.*

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