

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.
THE DIVINE PERSONALITY.

BY JAMES H. FAIRCHILD, D.D., PRESIDENT OF OBERLIN COLLEGE.

THE one great influential fact in the presentation of God which the Scriptures afford is the distinctness of his personality. We come to know him as we know a father or a friend. He makes the world, and fits it up for man's abode, rejoicing in his work. He makes man from the dust of the earth, and breathes into him a living soul. He plants a garden, and places in it the man he has made. He organizes the family, and crowns it with his blessing. His love and providential care follow the race even in their sin. He draws near in personal favor to them that love him, and they walk with him; and to make this friendship more real to the world of unbelievers he takes up to his own presence, before their eyes, one with whom he had been pleased. To establish and maintain more fully in the world a knowledge of himself, he makes a single family the recipients of his manifestations. Through generations and centuries of unwearied care he builds up this family into a nation, distinguished from the nations of the earth by the presence and favor of God, and by a civilization, a morality, and a religion which no other nation approached. With a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm he opened a way before them through the sea, and through the wilderness, and through hostile nations. To impress them and all mankind with his personal

presence he maintained before them, by a perpetual miracle, a visible token of his presence in the pillar of cloud and of fire. He utters his law from Sinai to the assembled hosts with his own voice, and writes it with his own finger upon the tables of stone as a perpetual memorial. He makes the tabernacle, and afterwards the temple, his dwelling-place, and with a visible glory overshadows the mercy-seat. When the fulness of time had come he sends forth the Messiah, "made of the seed of David according to the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. i. 3, 4). The personality of God in the incarnation is brought nearer to the thoughts and hearts of men, and yet the exhibition of the great fact is scarcely more distinct than in the Old Testament dispensation. The doctrine of the Divine Spirit brings the fact of God's personality to our very bosoms. God dwells not in the heavens alone, but also with "him who is of a humble and a contrite heart, and who trembles at his word." Thus the Bible brings us to God, and God to us, — not a vague and shadowy idea, an abstraction, but a being instinct with thought and feeling and life, our Creator, our Sovereign, our Saviour, and Friend.

Human reason, unaided, might never have grasped and held this idea of God, but when once presented to our thought it meets, as no other conception could, the wants of our souls in reason and in feeling. Indeed, the highest reason can find no other resting-place in its search for the ground and source of finite being, the world we see and are, but an infinite personality — a being that thinks and feels and wills and lives. The rational demand for an ultimate cause is satisfied only when we reach a self-existent, eternal person. The rational principle by which we demand a cause requires a real and an adequate cause, an original and originating force. We find such a cause only in active intelligence — a person thinking and feeling and willing. If we attempt in thought to follow back the series of dependent existence to its source, we find no rest in any term or individual of that series, how-

ever remote ; each link but receives the force communicated to it, and transmits it to the succeeding. We cease our inquiry only when we reach a power which is capable of originating the series. That originating force is found only in personal being — a being like ourselves in essential attributes, but independent and eternal. Thus the existence of the world is explained, so far as explanation is called for, and our thought is satisfied. Short of this there is no resting-place. If we take the direction which mere physical science would open to us, and derive each complicated form of life from something simpler and more elementary, until we reach the primal germ which holds in itself the laws and forces out of which the world is to rise, we must still look beyond to the creative wisdom and will which enveloped in this germ or seed of the universe such powers and possibilities. The universe in a nut-shell is the universe still — its problems and marvels concentrated indeed, but not disposed of ; and the cause which is adequate to create the world in gross is the only cause which could wrap it up in a germ from which it should spring by inherent forces. It is conceivable that physical science should demonstrate this germ, but persistent reason will still inquire, Who made the germ ? We must come to God at last in his independent personality.

Metaphysical science is equally impotent to afford us a resting-place in any law or force or substance or substratum of being — whatever it may be called — of which the actual known universe is but a phenomenal exhibition. That ultimate substance or force must contain in itself all that we see and know, — all that appears of the outward world, — and there remains still the demand for a Creator to originate and arrange this marvellous spiritual microcosm. It is but a reproduction of the vain attempt of physical science to originate the world. We have in this ultimate substance a spiritual or metaphysical germ, intangible and invisible indeed, embraced by the thought, and not by the senses ; but it is still the dependent finite world, and the unsatisfied reason must still go on feeling after God and finding him. Thus true

rationalism, as well as revelation, brings us to God ; or, to speak more exactly, human reason embraces and rests in the God of revelation—a personal Creator, Sovereign, and Father, and turns away unsatisfied from every proposed ultimate which is impersonal, whether material or immaterial. We accept as a *rational* truth the statement that “the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb. xi. 3). In this respect the highest attainment of philosophy cannot transcend the simplest apprehension of the child. God lives, and we are his creatures. “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the work of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest : and they all shall wax old as doth a garment : and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed ; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail” (Heb. i. 10, 11).

This doctrine of the divine personality commends itself to our hearts no less than to our rational thought. Our dependent human nature looks for somewhat to lean upon. “We are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow” (Job viii. 9). We are *in* the material world, but not *of* it. We find in ourselves capacities and susceptibilities that give to our being inestimable value. Interests immeasurable to finite thought gather upon every human soul. There is dignity and worth in such a being ; but in the possession of this nature there is ground for the gravest anxieties. Is there a destiny for us corresponding with our nature ? Are there place and time and circumstances where this being shall realize its aspirations ? And what hand shall guide us to that consummation ? Is there any ordered course of life in the pursuit of which we shall attain the good ? Or are we drifting helplessly and hopelessly in the tide of being, like the mote driven by the aimless breeze ?

Such inquiries would indicate no sentimental weakness. They spring from the loftiness of human nature, and not from its meanness. If we were like inert matter, or like the

brutes, that perish, no such anxiety or questioning would come to us. These susceptibilities, this capability of a destiny, make us dependent. In the apprehension of a personal God our hearts find a solution for all these problems of existence — not in detail, but comprehensively and summarily. Because God lives we shall live also. There is a being whose eye is upon us, who counts us his treasure, who places and keeps us here, and who in his own time will take us to himself. Upon this fact of God's being the human soul fastens, and will not let it go — the obedient in hope, and the disobedient in apprehension. The thought of God comes to man with authority, and maintains its place against all theoretical doubt or wilful repugnance. Human nature was made to accept the idea of God — his claims and authority — as the child was made for parental control and guidance. The child accords to the parent his place without any logical demonstration of the parent's right or his own want. There is abundant basis for the logical demonstration of both; but the instinctive movement of his nature to the parental claim is antecedent to all reasoning, and far mightier. Thus men stand in relation to a personal God. The demonstration of his existence they may not apprehend, but in their hearts they accept him. The idea of God does not come to men like a fact of history or a truth of science, to be remembered or forgotten. It comes to take root, it fastens itself upon the nature. The human soul is the natural soil for this heavenly seed, and when once it has germinated it can be eradicated only by an utter subversion of the nature. Speculative philosophy, even by a demonstration of atheism, could not supplant this instinctive looking to a personal God. Under the pressure of want even the *atheist* drops his philosophy and prays. He may afterward laugh at his simplicity, and call it superstition, but superstition itself, in its most offensive forms, is a demonstration of the fact that the human soul in its deepest degradation clings to the thought, or rather feeling, of a personal God. That thought and feeling present great differences of expression in logical formulas of creeds, and

in practical forms of worship, often very crude and imperfect, sometimes even loathsome ; but the most unsatisfactory of them all shows that the human soul was made for the idea of God ; that this idea survives when history and science and art have alike been lost. The reaction of the individual character and life upon the idea corrupts and degrades, but cannot obliterate it. The vitality of the idea depends not wholly or chiefly upon the logical proof, but more upon the instinctive attitude of the soul itself — the disposition to acknowledge a Creator and Sovereign.

It is not to any abstraction, any substratum of being, any formative principle of nature, any aggregation of forces, that the human heart thus responds ; it is to a being of positive powers, the attributes of personality, who in his nature stands face to face with us, but is transcendent in the reach of his faculties — a being “that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers ; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in” (Isa. xi. 22). This is the being whom we recognize as God, the very thought of whom has more power in the world than all philosophy and all science.

The more fully the human soul is brought out in its wants and susceptibilities, and becomes conscious of its own being in its interests and worth, so much the more does the fact of God’s personal nature, with the character for goodness and faithfulness which the Scriptures give him, take hold of the heart. The response is no longer in fear and dread alone,— the sentiment which inspires the worship of heathen,— but in hope and adoration and love and confidence. God comes to be regarded as a father and a friend, and the attractions toward him are multiplied and intensified. “His name” becomes “a strong tower” to which “the righteous runneth, and is safe” (Prov. xviii. 10). His favor is life ; his “loving kindness is better than life” (Ps. lxxiii. 5). All that we apprehend as good is found in the knowledge and the love of God, and the earnest seeker cries out : “As the hart panteth

after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps. xlii. 1). "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 25).

Our relationship to God as a person is a natural one, provided for in our constitution as really as the relationships of our natural life. It is this fact which makes man a religious being — a being that has a natural tendency to worship, to accept readily the idea of God, to feel after him and find him. A natural history of man involving any complete analysis of his life could never overlook these tendencies.

Under the great law of correspondences in nature these tendencies are proof of the existence of the being towards whom they point. In the presence of such a being our nature is explained. We form part of a complete and symmetrical system. Without God we are fragmentary and anomalous. We have impulses that lead no whither, tendencies that point to nothing. Our effort to worship is a projection of ourselves upon empty space. The outcry of the soul for help and support is a vain and unmeaning struggle, fruitless and baseless, which even the modern development system cannot explain. When God comes in, our feet touch the rock, and we stand erect with the inspiration of hope. The heavens above us stoop with sympathy and benignity; nature is vindicated and reason satisfied.

This fact of God's personality is fruitful of results. The whole system of religion in its doctrines and its duties grows out of and finds its explanation in it. The attributes of God are the attributes of a person modified and extended by this fact of his independent and unconditioned being. In this freedom from limitations — that he is without beginning and uncaused — lie the *mysteries of his nature*. Such depths our thoughts cannot fathom. But it is not to our souls a yawning chasm which may engulf us, — not the unapproachable and inconceivable, infinite and absolute abstraction, from which we shrink as from annihilation. We stand before the Infinite Father, "whose ways are not as our ways, or his thoughts as our thoughts" (Isa. lv. 8), because he ranges

space and eternity ; so that " all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do " (Heb. iv. 13). It is the infinity of personality that surrounds us, not the infinity of nothingness. The universe is vitalized by his infinite life. Instead of taking from God all that can characterize him, and make him apprehensible to us, the Bible doctrine of his infinity confers upon him every attribute that renders him precious to our souls, and then exalts these attributes by making them infinite. Thus in God's infinity we find our resting-place. The mysteries of his being are simply the exhaustless and incomprehensible wealth of his nature.

His *goodness* is not a goodness of which we cannot comprehend the nature or principle ; it is the goodness of benevolence, the goodness of love, a goodness that transcends human goodness as his powers transcend our own. The love of God is not an element of his nature, involuntary and irresponsible. It is a positive and active outgoing of goodness to every soul that he has made ; a love directed by infinite wisdom and sustained by un failing fidelity, perfectly comprehensible in its nature, but in its height and depth and length and breadth surpassing knowledge.

The *independence* of God is not the independence of indifference, but of self-sufficiency. He does not stand remote from the changes of our mortal life, unmoved by what we enjoy or suffer. " In all our afflictions he is afflicted " (Isa. lxiii. 9). " As a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust " (Ps. ciii. 13, 14). He is independent in his infinite fulness of blessedness in himself and of blessing to others, *not* in being above sympathy with his finite creatures.

The *sovereignty* of God is the sovereignty of wisdom and of love, not of fate or necessity or arbitrary will. Like a father in the midst of his household, he directs all things by a watchful providence, appointing to every soul in unerring wisdom, restraining, tolerating, punishing, as the highest

good requires. God's ways are mysterious to us, because they are so far-reaching and so wise; not because he is governed by any principle of action which we cannot understand — mysterious as the wisdom of the parent is mysterious to the child. Of all principles of action the simplest and most luminous is the principle of benevolent love, and this is the expression of God's entire activity. The "clouds and darkness which are round about him" are but the "righteousness and judgment which are the habitation of his throne" (Ps. xcvii. 2); dark and impenetrable to us because of the immeasurable reach of his goodness.

The *works* of God, contemplated in the light of his personal nature and power, equally commend themselves to our reason. The creation is but a natural movement and expression of his power and wisdom and goodness. To such a being there can be no difficulty in creating a system like this material universe, and peopling it with beings capable of knowing and loving him; and what more natural to infinite goodness than to delight in such a work? It matters not to us at what point in the development of the system the creative power ceased to operate. The direct result of his volition may have been merely to scatter the "star dust" broadcast upon space, with all the complicated movements and forces impressed upon it which should work out the living world as we see it to-day; or each particular sphere may have rolled in full form from his hand as it started upon its endless revolution. With a personal God back of all this arrangement we indulge such questions merely as matters of scientific curiosity, not of faith; and when the latest dream of empirical science shall have been realized, demonstrating the germ from which the world has sprung, we shall still be able to say: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all" (Ps. civ. 24).

Just as simple and natural in the presence of a personal God is the fact of *revelation*. Why should not God reveal himself to the creatures that he has made, and that need the manifestation? That there should be any difficulty in

the way of a revelation, made either objectively, in forms addressed to the sense, or subjectively to the thought and consciousness, is even inconceivable. God that made the soul must know all the avenues to it, and be able to show himself to us as he pleases. If it is good for man to know God, we may trust God's goodness to supply that want. Thus we may accept the Scriptures as the record of his communication with men, as intelligible and reasonable as the history of a father's communication with his children. The miracles recorded in these Scriptures lose all their incredibility, and may be proved by the same evidence by which we prove any overt act of our neighbor. The miracle is supernatural, but God is supernatural too. Nature is his handiwork, subject to his power and will. If he chooses to show his power and presence to man by a demonstration out of nature and above it, who shall hinder? and the miracle is so far from being incredible that it seems one of the most probable and reasonable events that fall to our experience — rare, indeed, but as capable of proof as the falling of an apple or the flying of a sparrow.

The mystery of *incarnation* even, as recorded in the Gospels, takes its place among events to be proved and believed. Accept the truth that God exists, and that we are his creatures, then the fact that he should come to his own in such a form as to make more real his personality and his presence is a marvel of goodness, but not of improbability. It is but the natural consummation of the whole scheme of divine revelation. In fine, anything in God's communication with men is reasonable and credible which infinite love would prompt, and which infinite wisdom and power could execute. The divine personality lays a foundation for all these demonstrations of his goodness.

The *divine government* with all its exhibitions of law and penalty and forgiveness springs inevitably from the same fact of God's personality, and is sustained by his personal manifestations. God in the midst of his dependent moral creatures, who need direction and restraint and control as posi-

tively as they need any other means of good, must provide for this great need. It is no more obvious that the parents in the family are to govern their children than that the Heavenly Father must accept the responsibility of governing his creatures, and that they must accept him as their ruler and sovereign. This is the only reasonable or even possible adjustment of the relations of Creator and creature in the moral universe. And this relation must be personal, involving the manifestation of God in his personal being and character and authority to the personal condition and character and conscience of the creature. Every soul must have essential knowledge of the fact that he is answerable to God for the purpose of his life and the ordering of his ways. The government must be comprehensive too, as well as individual. These creatures of God are related to each other. They are grouped in families and nations and races; and the human family on earth is but one member of the great community of moral beings of whom God is the Father and Head. The conduct and destiny of each one of these concern all the rest, and God's bearing toward each is of interest to all. They are moral beings, to be dealt with as having a character of their own, and controlled by motive, not by force. Even omnipotent power is not available for the direct control of a world of moral beings; the whole force of his personality must be brought to bear upon them. It is not enough that as moral beings they apprehend in their own conscience the principles of obligation and righteousness. The authority of God as a personal ruler must stand back of that mere ethical perception and reinforce it. The rational perception of duty, such as every moral being must have by virtue of his own nature, has some force—enough to determine obligation and make righteousness possible; but when the voice of God is heard proclaiming the utterances of conscience as his own eternal law, then a new force is added to obligation, and sin becomes not merely an offence against conscience,—a disregard of one's own reason and judgment,—but a refusal to respect the wisdom and the will of the

infinite and perfect One "in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways" (Dan. v. 23).

The Scriptures are vital with the expression of God's personal claims upon his creatures to such an extent that it is rare to find any other exhibition of duty than that it is the will of God. When we look carefully into these precepts, we find that they embody the principles of righteousness given in our own reason and conscience; but what force and authority are added when they come to us as the expression of the personal will of God! The decalogue itself contains only the common principles of righteousness, which all men recognize as binding in their own conscience, and which are found more or less distinctly expressed in the ethical records of all nations; but what vitality and majesty and power they gain by their utterance from Sinai as the voice of Jehovah! We do not hear the feeble ethical announcement, "It is wrong to worship idols. It is wrong to steal and to kill," but, "I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . . Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. . . . Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal." Thus everywhere the personality of God stands back of the idea of duty, and the claims of conscience are quickened and enforced by his supreme authority. God has not only made the human conscience capable of apprehending obligation, but he has proclaimed his law, which covers the whole range of obligation, and quickens the conscience with the apprehension of his own personal interest in the performance of the duty. Thus religion and duty are blended, and that religion only is acceptable which carries with it the spirit of obedience and righteousness. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22). "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah vi. 8.) Thus duty, as well as religion, becomes a personal matter between God and the creature.

But the *sanctions* of God's law, as well as the precept, are charged with his own personality. The obedient soul is not left to the mere satisfaction of his own approval, the assurance that he shall stand right before his own conscience, and can live comfortably with himself; nor to the vague trust of the philosopher, that "No evil can happen to the good man, whether he lives or dies";¹ but the Lord of heaven and earth personally intervenes, and pledges his own attributes to the blessedness of the faithful soul. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. xxxiii. 26, 27). "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. xxxiv. 7). "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 7). The Scriptures abound in such declarations, and they are necessary inferences from the divine personality. It is inconceivable that the infinite personal Jehovah should not deliver the soul that hath set his love upon him (Ps. xci. 14).

Just as explicit are the declarations in reference to the calamity that shall overtake the sinner. He is not left to the simple reaction of sin upon his own nature—the consequences of his overt sinful acts upon his physical and spiritual constitution, and the self-condemnation which falls upon every moral being in sin by virtue of his moral nature. These results are inevitable, and help make up the burden with which sin loads its servants; and to this burden must be added the reprobation and contempt of the world of moral beings who become cognizant of the sin. In the Scriptures all these things seem to be assumed, and passed over with little notice. In themselves they are significant and weighty, but in comparison with this divine displeasure, the just condemnation of him "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" (Hab. i. 13), it does not seem necessary to name them.

¹ Cic. De Con. Mor.

All are lost sight of in the presence of the "indignation and wrath, the tribulation and anguish," which must fall "upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. ii. 8, 9). The human heart shrinks at times from the appalling representations of that hour when "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 7, 8). It seems a relief to hide ourselves from the divine personality in punishment, and interpose nature and conscience and the constitution of things between our souls and the wrath of God. There is even a sentiment that by such an interposition we can save God from the responsibility of a direct share in the sinner's destruction. It is pleasanter to think that the sinner destroys himself than that he "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day" (2 Thess. i. 9). But a distinct recognition of the personality of God makes such a conception nugatory. With all the force of his infinite nature he must maintain righteousness and rebuke sin. The divine condemnation cannot be a mere ethical judgment of the sinner's unworthiness, a purely rational apprehension of the ill-desert of sin. God's personal disapprobation must fall upon the sinner; and this must be, beyond all comparison, the chief factor in the calamity that overwhelms him. The ruin of sin cannot be purely and only natural; the divine personality must bring in a supernatural element, and this the Scriptures constantly present.

Out of the same great fact of the divine nature springs the significance of forgiveness. To be reconciled to God implies a profounder idea than the mere restoration of the harmonious action of one's own nature, a submission of the will to the guidance of conscience. All this is implied in the turning from sin to righteousness; but there is much more than this. The soul is relieved of the burden of God's disapprobation, and "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"

(Phil. iv. 7) takes the place of his disapprobation. The personal reconciliation in the case of human souls that have been alienated from each other is but a feeble shadow of that "everlasting kindness" with which God draws near to his penitent creature (Isa. liv. 7, 8). Condemnation and pardon are correlatives, and both are inseparable from the personality of God.

About the same grand truth of God's personal nature all the *duties* of religion gather, as well as its doctrines. What we owe to God springs from the fact of his personal character, of his providence and care for us, and our dependence upon him. Obedience to God is a natural duty of the same nature with the duty of the child to a parent who watches over him, and upon whom he depends. It is no arbitrary requirement on God's part. It is the only proper attitude of a finite moral being toward a being who is infinite and perfect.

Faith toward God is but the confidence which is due to him in response to his personal attributes and character. He is a trustworthy Being, and faith is the recognition and acknowledgment of this fact—the only reasonable and natural attitude. It is no mysterious or incomprehensible requirement, but a duty so obvious and plain that no one ever fails in it from want of understanding. It is very possible to mystify and bewilder by elaborate explanations; but the earnest soul never comes short of the duty by reason of such bewilderment. If he has a heart to render to God what is honestly his due, he will begin by treating him as trustworthy.

Worship, too, is but a natural expression of the reverence and confidence and love due to God in his infinite personality. It is no aimless outgoing, like the instinctive cry of an infant that knows not of an ear that hears; but it is the rational communication of the soul with God. He that comes to God "believes that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that seek him." Adoration and thanksgiving and confession and supplication are the proper utterances of the soul before him. No costly sacrifices can please him, no abstrac-

tion of thought like that of the Eastern devotee, no movement of ritualistic machinery, no mystical introversion or working up of spiritual frames and exercises. "God is a Spirit [an intelligence], and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24). This worship leads us outward in thought and spirit to God, and the more simple and direct the approach, the more satisfactory to God and to man. "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt. vi. 9), and "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13) are the loftiest models of sincere worship.

The morality of religion is in its nature and principle the morality of philosophy. Human reason finds nothing more elementary or ultimate in duty than the "love" which "is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10). But philosophy can only state the principle. In the presence of a personal God this principle becomes the divine law, proclaimed with the authority of the rightful Sovereign of the universe, and sustained with his infinite resources. What was before an abstract principle of obligation becomes now an expression of divine wisdom and will, and conformity to obligation becomes obedience to God. Men do not need so much the knowledge of duty as motives and persuasions to its performance; and the force of the Bible as promotive of good morals is not chiefly in the clearer precepts of duty and the higher principles which it embodies, but in its clearer presentation of God as a moral Governor, who embodies in his own character the principles of righteousness, who holds men accountable for their conduct, and who will bring them into judgment. The great reformatory idea of the world is the idea of God as the Scriptures present it. It has force with the child who has first apprehended the fact that God sees him, and with the man in his maturity, who even in a life of sin has not been able to shake off the thought of God. It reaches men in the humblest spheres, in the secrets of their own hearts where questions of right and wrong are pondered, or sitting upon thrones in power and pride. The

handwriting from God arrests them in their confidence and restrains their impiety. If the sin and wretchedness of the world are ever cured, it will be by making men acquainted with God, and bringing their lives into harmony with him. This is the great object of revelation. The whole movement of God's providence in the world has had this aim, to bless men with the knowledge of himself.

The knowledge of God can never grow old or become ineffective to the human soul. Other ideas and philosophies will have their day. For a longer or shorter period they may hold the mind; but they are at length outgrown, and other expressions of truth take their place. The idea of God is the oldest ever given to human thought, and it is as fresh and vigorous to-day as when first apprehended by men. The great fact of the world is the fact that God is, and the great thought of the world is the thought of God.

ARTICLE II.

THE IRREPRESSIBLE CONFLICT.¹

BY DR. H. VON HOLST, PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF FREIBURG,
GERMANY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—A foreigner venturing to lecture before an American audience on the Irrepressible Conflict,—is not that “carrying owls to Athens”? Perhaps I would have no right to complain if that should have been your first thought when you learned on what subject I proposed to address you. What I have but studied in dusty documents is with many of you a chapter of your own life, of which no line can ever be obliterated from memory, because it has been written into your hearts with blood and with tears. Yet, as I have these last fifteen years devoted the best part of my time

¹ A Lecture delivered at Oberlin College Oct. 4, 1883. [This has been carefully written out by the distinguished author for the pages of the *Bibliotheca Sacra*. — Eds.]