

(*Cat.* xv. 22). Chrysostom has the same idea. But the Gospels give no support to it; and it is strange to find it in writers who are quite ready to interpret the preceding words about signs in the sun, moon, and stars as symbolical. Thus, the moon is the Church, which will then receive no light from Christ who is the Sun, and the stars are the saints who will then lose their influence. So that while heavenly bodies which really exist are treated as symbols, language which is probably symbolical is interpreted very realistically of a luminous cross, visible to the physical eye, and darkening by its brilliancy sun, moon, and stars. This highly questionable interpretation has been preached in our own day as if it were a certainty, and perhaps still is preached by some.

Dr. Sanday, in his very valuable volume on *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, has done excellent service in calling attention to the very large part which symbolism has to play in the Bible. Truth could not be conveyed, or could not so naturally and easily be conveyed, in any other way. And at the time of Christ apocalyptic language had

become current among the Jews to an extent which even now only scholars are beginning to realize. The only Jewish apocalypse with which ordinary Christian readers are familiar is the Book of Daniel. Very few read the Second Book of Esdras in the Apocrypha. But now, thanks to the labours of Dr. Charles and others, we have seven or eight other writings of a similar character translated into English, and they throw much light upon the language used by our Lord and His disciples. As Dr. Sanday points out, when our Lord said, 'I beheld Satan fall as lightning from heaven' (Lk 10¹⁸), He was using apocalyptic language, which 'belongs to the same category as the description of Satan being cast into the lake of fire in the Revelation of St. John. That, it might be said, is Jewish and fantastic; but the *meaning* of our Lord was not at all fantastic. What He meant was that the victory over the Power of Evil was virtually won.'

In investigating this subject for ourselves, and still more in imparting the results of our investigations to others, let us be mindful of the peril of taking symbolical language literally.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE PSALMS.

PSALM VIII. 4.

'What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?'

The eighth Psalm is a very striking one. It lifts the mind of the reader to a lofty height where he seems to have soared above sin and sorrow. It exults in man's greatness and Nature's grandeur. It is not Hebrew and theocratic, but human and universal. What it says is said of man as man; of man as he ought to be, was meant to be, may be. The subject is Humanity.

This is the Psalm of the Twilight, just as the nineteenth Psalm is the Psalm of Sunrise or of Morning. The theme of both is the heavens; but in this Psalm we have the heavens spoken of amid the gathering darkness of the evening, whereas in the nineteenth we have the heavens spoken of in the increasing light of morn.

Who is the speaker? Are we reading the experiences of the stripling still watching over

his father's flocks by night in the upland pastures of Bethlehem? Or of the lonely fugitive contemplating the starry skies from the broad plains of Philistia? Or of the powerful sovereign gazing upward to the overhanging vault from the palace roofs of Zion? Whether David the shepherd lad; or David the outlaw, or David the king, it matters not. The central idea of this magnificent Psalm is plainly expressed, and makes no demands on historical criticism for its elucidation. Surveying the outspread canopy of heaven the Psalmist is overwhelmed with awe at the scene. Its vast expanse, its fathomless blue, its starry glories, its beauty, its purity, its repose, all appal him with the sense of their grandeur; and, crushed with the contrast between the greatness of universal creation and the littleness of the individual man, he exclaims bewildered and amazed, 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that

thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?' Mystery of mystery, that one so mean—an atom in this limitless expanse, a mote in this faultless glory, a flutter in this infinite calm—should be singled out for Thy special favour, and endowed with authority as Thy vicegerent upon earth. Could any paradox be imagined greater than this—this contrast between the insignificance of man's self and the pre-eminence of man's destiny?

Pass from the early dawn to the late afternoon of human history. The lapse of eight-and-twenty centuries is a large space in the life of mankind. It is a vast and profound chiasm, which separates the simple inspiration of the shepherd-king from the many-sided culture of the poet, critic, philosopher, novelist, scientific investigator, the typical representative of modern thought and intellect in its latest phases. Yet to Goethe, holding solitary communion with nature in its higher forms, and contemplating earth and sky from the summit of the Brocken, the Psalmist's thought still recurs with resistless importunity and finds its natural expression still in the Psalmist's words, 'Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?' No interval of time nor transference of scene has tarnished its freshness, or robbed it of its power.¹

I.

THE LITTLENES OF MAN IN THE PRESENCE OF THE UNIVERSE.

I. The Vastness of the Universe.—It is not the language of hyperbole but of fact when we speak of innumerable stars which exist everywhere in the infinity of space, compared with which the life of any individual man is only like a grain of sand, a leaf of the forest, a drop of water spilt upon the earth. Nor is the overpowering thought at all lessened, but the wonder is increased, when some one tells us that the world is infinite in minuteness as well as in vastness. We say with a meaning which could not have been equally present to the Psalmist, and perhaps with a sadder accent: 'Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?' When, again, we consider the immeasurable periods of time during which the earth was a desert chaos torn by natural convulsions, or the later stages of the world's history, in which the animals were struggling for existence, and huge behemoths and leviathans moved upon land and water; or, later still, when the first traces of man appear in holes of the rocks or lacustrine dwellings—do we not feel a sort of

¹ Bishop Lightfoot.

discouragement? and the consciousness of law in all things which had once comforted us begins to terrify us. We are aware that nature, like art, though more beautiful and glorious far, is not the true image of God, and that 'not there, not there,' are the foundations of human life to be sought.

Methought that my body sank down in ruins, and my inner form stepped out appalled in light; and by my side there stood another Form which resembled my own, except that it did not shine like mine, but lightened unceasingly. And I flew along with the Form. In a moment our earth fell back, behind our consuming flight, into an abyss of distance; a faint gleam only was reflected from the summits of the Cordilleras, and a few moments more reduced the sun to a little star; and soon there remained nothing visible of our system except a comet which was travelling from our sun with an angelic speed in the direction of Sirius. Our flight now carried us so rapidly through the flocks of solar bodies—flocks past counting, unless to their heavenly Shepherd—that scarcely could they expand themselves before us into the magnitude of moons, before they sank behind us into pale nebular gleams; and their planetary earths could not reveal themselves for a moment to the transcendent rapidity of our course. At length Sirius and all the brotherhood of our constellations and the galaxy of our heavens stood far below our feet as a little nebula amongst other yet more distant nebulae. Thus we flew on through the starry wildernesses; one heaven after another unfurled its immeasurable banners before us, and then rolled up behind us: galaxy behind galaxy towered up into solemn altitudes before which the spirit shuddered; and they stood in long array through which the Infinite Being might pass in progress. As we were thus swallowed up by one abyss of stars after another, and the heavens above our heads were not emptier, neither were the heavens below them fuller; and as suns without intermission fell into the solar ocean like waterspouts of a storm which fall into the ocean of waters; then at length the human heart within me was overburdened and weary, and yearned after some narrow cell or quiet oratory in this metropolitan cathedral of the universe. And I said to the form at my side, 'O Spirit! has then this universe no end?' And the Form answered and said, 'Lo! it has no beginning.'²

2. The Insignificance of Man.—I. The littleness of man consists in two things, his smallness and his weakness.

(1) Man is *small*. The heavens are vast; vaster far than the writer of the eighth Psalm had any idea of. And the sun is larger, and the moon, and the stars, and the spaces that separate the stars. And within certain limits this seems to us to make no difference. We do not think a man of more importance because he is bigger;

² De Quincey, *Dream of the Universe*.

nor do we think whales or elephants of more importance than ourselves. But beyond those limits our imagination seems overpowered, and even vastness of space seems to offer a kind of importance in itself, and it seems hard to believe that a creature no bigger than a man should have any importance in the eyes of the Creator who made the sun. But this is not all. Man is small in a double sense. He is small in size, but he is also small as being one unit in a vast multitude. There are many more of his kind. If one go wrong, or if one be lost, there are millions to spare.

(2) Once again, man is *weak*. And this seems a still greater reason for despising him. The difference between smallness and vastness is, after all, external and material. However much we are struck with it at first, the more we reflect, the less important it seems; and it may be we arrive at last at something like scorn for those who would lay any stress on it at all. But the difference between weakness and strength is of another and a higher sort, and it is plain enough that man is weak. God has given man wonderful knowledge, at which the possessors cannot but marvel; but all the more striking is the contrast between that great knowledge and the little strength that goes with it. Man is weak. He cannot alter in the very slightest degree the laws that God has stamped on nature, and his power to act under those laws is limited to a trifling muscular force. By the use of his knowledge he can produce effects far beyond the reach of his muscles; but when he has done all that he can, his imagination outstrips it all so easily, that he is only still more conscious of his weakness. What he does can be done only by the aid of time, and thought, and combination. His very possessions are the accumulation of many generations, and seem due rather to the direction of an overruling law or government than to his own efforts. It might seem that, if he had been a creature of high value, he would have been entrusted with greater powers, and that his dominion over sea and land and all therein would not have been so hampered and restrained. Compare the forces that are given to man with those that are implanted in Nature. Compare human strength with the power of the earthquake, the volcano, the hurricane. Compare it with the violence of fire, with the force of an inundation.

Those dead material powers make all human strength a mere plaything.

We, who are considered tall if we are seventy-two inches high, who cannot walk faster than three or four miles an hour, who die almost as soon as we are born, must feel very, very insignificant, if we look only at our relations with space or time, and compare ourselves in these respects with galaxies of worlds. We shall be inclined to adopt the poet's words—

'See how beneath the moonbeam's smile
 Yon little billow heaves its breast,
 And foams and sparkles for a while,
 And murmuring then subsides to rest.
 Thus man, the sport of bliss and care,
 Rises on time's eventful sea,
 And having swelled a moment there,
 Then melts into eternity.'

This kind of sentiment is just now in the air. One of the most striking characteristics of the modern mind is the tendency to think less of man, in proportion as larger views have to be taken of the universe in which man dwells. Human beings are often nowadays regarded as mere ripples upon the infinite ocean of matter.¹

A friend had been visiting Carlyle at Chelsea, and as they parted at the door, they looked up into the starlit sky. 'It's a grand sight,' said Carlyle's friend. 'A grand sight, d'ye say?' cried the sage. 'Man, it's just dreadful!'

2. Nor is it merely the vastness and the permanence of the great objects of the material universe, by which we are sunk into abysses of humiliation in which we begin to be incredulous that God should care for us. The humiliation is deepened by the discovery that our own life is akin to the inferior forms of life around us—akin, not only to the life of those animals in whose structure there are the closest analogies to our own, but akin to forms of life which look most remote from ourselves. I came from the dust,—the Book of Genesis had told me so before science had discovered it,—and in the very lowest types of living creatures there are prophecies of the life by which I am animated. The gradations which separate rank from rank in this living hierarchy are so fine, so subtle, that there seems to be no clear break in the ascending series; and in the very highest there still survive affinities to the lowest. What right have I to separate myself from the creatures to which I am so closely related? What right have I to claim a different rank and a different destiny from the deer which browse in the glens, from the fish which flash in the burns, from the very grass and heather which cover the hills?

¹A. W. Momerie.

In the history of Christian civilization there have been two great discoveries which have, in their own time and in their own way, done more than anything else to shock the established and settled notions of men and to make their faith reel and stagger. The first of these was early in the sixteenth century, when Copernicus explained the solar system. The world, regarded in old times as the centre of all things, as the apple of God's eye, for the sake of which were created moon and sun and stars, suddenly was found to be one of many balls that roll round a giant sphere of light and heat, which is itself but one among innumerable suns, attended each by a number of planets and scattered, how we know not, through infinity. Here was a reversal of popular opinion! It is no wonder that the Church's breath was, as it were, taken away by such a discovery as this. It seemed to be the denial of the Scriptures and the destruction of the Faith. And the progressive discoveries of science have only magnified and intensified this sense of vastness, until the earth seems to be nothing but an inconsiderable speck among a myriad of other worlds; and man, whose breath is in his nostrils, what is he that he should be accounted of?

The second discovery which, after the substitution of the Copernican for the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, has most profoundly affected the thoughts and beliefs of men was made in the nineteenth century. It was that which is always associated with the name of Darwin—in a word, the theory of Evolution. If man was shocked to discover that *his* world, instead of being the centre of creation, was but (in point of extent) an insignificant atom, it was not less humiliating and shocking to find that he himself, instead of being separated by an infinite distance from the 'sheep and oxen' and all other things which are in subjection under his feet, was akin to them all. To be told that the dogma of the immutability of species was no longer tenable, appeared a kind of impiety. The doctrine of separate creations—of the complete distinction of man from the rest of nature—seemed to him the very essence of religion. He had got it, as he thought, from the Bible, though, as a matter of fact, it was Milton rather than Moses who had fixed the popular notions of creation. In short, people said very much the same things about Evolution in the nineteenth century as people said about the Copernican system in the sixteenth. Good men were amazed and confounded; they did not know where they were; the ground on which they stood seemed to be slipping from beneath them: the very foundations of the earth were out of course.¹

II.

THE GREATNESS OF MAN IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

I. Man is greater than Nature because of his Possibilities.—In the eyes of an intellectual and spiritual being, material bulk is not the only or the highest test of greatness. If God is not to be supposed to be mainly interested in vast accumulations of senseless matter; if there be in the estimate of a moral

¹H. R. Gamble.

Being other and worthier measures of greatness; if the organic be higher than the inorganic; and that which feels than that which has no feeling; if that which thinks is higher than that which only feels; and that which freely conforms to moral will higher than that which only thinks; if a fly be really a nobler thing than a granite mountain, and a little child than a rhinoceros or a mammoth,—then we need not acquiesce in any depreciatory estimate of man's place in creation or of his claims upon the ear of God.

The whole world in which we live is a mere speck in the universe; and it is said to be incredible that God should have any special care for it, or for those who inhabit it. There are times when this plea seems to have a terrible force. But when I come to myself, and recover from the power which the vast spaces of the material universe exert over my imagination, there seems to be a certain moral and intellectual vulgarity in attaching such importance to mere material magnitude. Jerusalem in its glory was a hamlet compared with Babylon; Florence, when it was brilliant with the genius which shines only the brighter as the ages pass by, was a mere village compared with Pekin; but who is so gross as to estimate the importance and dignity of a city by its magnitude? A sonnet of Milton's, an essay of Bacon's, a dialogue of Plato's, a volume of Newton's, could be less easily spared than whole tons of lumber that load the shelves of libraries. On a few square inches of canvas there is sometimes more costly work than in a picture which would cover the side of a house. No doubt the world is very small, but it does not follow that it contains nothing for which the great Father of us all can think it worth while to care. In a palace it may happen that there are rooms hardly noticed by those who are confounded with the splendour and stateliness and space of its great apartments—rooms hidden away in one of the wings, plainly furnished, insignificant in size, but which are more in the thought and heart of the king than all the rooms in the palace besides. They are the rooms in which his children play by day and sleep by night. Yes, the world is very small; but what then? If it is large enough to hold the children of God, God may be mindful of us; God may visit us, and God may bless us. In this controversy, the appeal to material magnitude is irrelevant.

I took the trouble to bring with me a book this morning: this tiny book, what they call the 'Thumb-nail Testament.' I carry it about with me in my vest pocket. What a tiny book! Measure that with the tape, weigh it in the scales; a child's hand will hold it, and yet that tiny book is the symbol of a power, the symbol of a glory, compared with which all planets that are above your heads are as nothing. Here is a book that has changed history, that has built cathedrals, that sends out missionaries, that has created civilization.¹

A bully at school oppresses a younger boy, and a despot oppresses millions of men; does the difference of the area over which the oppression is exercised affect in the slightest degree either the fact or the character of the fact? Oppression is oppression, whether its victim be one shrinking lad, or a hundred million down-trodden peasants.²

One revelation measures the difference between man and all other creatures. We have an account in the Bible of the Creation; we have also an account of the Redemption. The most striking characteristic of the description of the Creation is its supreme and absolute ease. Without attempting to press the mere words or images used in the first chapter of Genesis, this at least is plain, that the writer would have us feel that to God the act of creating cost no effort at all. He said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. No toil, nor thought, nor time, nor force are requisite. He utters the words, and His words create. How far other is the account of Redemption! To lift the human soul from darkness to light, what trials it cost, what labour, what time, what suffering! The Creation was the work of a word. The Redemption was the work of a life—of a life of self-denial, of a death on the Cross. The Creation cost God nothing. The Redemption cost the death of His Son, and all that that death implied. Measure the distance between the words 'Let there be light' and the words 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,' and that will show the interval which separates the value of the created Universe from the value of Man.

What am I that there should be
Thought or care in heaven for me,
That the Father's heart should long
To turn my sorrow into song,
Or that Christ should die to win
Such a soul as mine from sin?

What am I? A pigmy form,
Feeble as a poor earth-worm;
Fain to make a little stir
Like the chirping grasshopper:
How should He that ruleth all
Care for anything so small?

¹ W. H. Fitchett.

² H. Hensley Henson.

Does He measure, then, by size,
Not as we are good or wise?
Is the senseless lump of earth
More to Him than manly worth?
Or the raging of the sea
More than reasoned thought in me?

Nay, such measurement were mean:
He is great whose soul is clean;
He is mighty who has Mind
Nature's Force to loose or bind;
He is worth the saving cross,
Whose death were an eternal loss.³

What are the possibilities which make man greater than Nature?

1. Look at his possibilities in *Mind*. 'When I consider thy heavens . . . what is man?' In the presence of this majestic spectacle of the material heavens, what is man? He is a being who has power to consider the heavens, to measure them, to weigh them, to analyze the stars, and to make them unburden their secrets. He has constructed a time-table of the heavenly movements, and we know their comings and their goings to a thousandth part of a second. Nay, we have even searched out the tracks of the comets, those wandering gipsies of the skies. We can calculate their reappearance after an absence of seventy years. Yes, man is a being greater than the heavens he contemplates, for he can understand them; he can interpret their order; he can arrange them in map-like precision, and discover their enormous secrets. But that is not all. Man not only interprets the order of Nature; he discerns her significance, he appreciates her beauty, he reads her message, he discovers her spiritual suggestion. The heavens are more to him than a vesture; they are a literature, and in them he deciphers the mind of God. To know the secret of Nature is to transcend her; to decipher the heavens is to prove our dominion.⁴

'Man,' says Pascal, 'is a feeble reed, trembling in the midst of creation; but then he is endowed with thought. It does not need the universe to arm for his destruction. A breath of wind, a drop of water will suffice to kill him. But, though the universe were to fall on man and crush him, he would be greater in his death than the universe in its victory; for he would be conscious of his defeat, and it would not be conscious of its triumph.'⁵

³ W. C. Smith, *Thoughts and Fancies for Sunday Evenings*, 82.

⁴ J. H. Jowett, in *The British Congregationalist*, March 21, 1907.

⁵ *Pensées*, xviii. II.

I remember seeing somewhere a phrase, used, I think, though I will not be sure, by the Rev. Arthur Mursell, formerly of Leicester, somewhat to this effect: 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but he does not know that he knows. *Man knows that he knows.*' This is surely a very good statement of a fact that eludes explanation. The lower creation, so far at least as we are able to observe it, seems to be conscious, but not self-conscious. The cow browsing in the field knows apparently what to do in order that she may sustain her physical life, but she is not aware of being an entity separate from the fields in which she feeds. She eats the grass, she goes home to be milked, she knows her own stall, she is conscious, but not self-conscious.¹

It was a far greater thing to be David contemplating the heavens than to be the heavens making eyes at David. It is a greater thing to be able to think the heavens than it is to be the heavens.²

2. Look at his possibilities in *Moral Capacity* or *Conscience*. We may call conscience by what name we please; call it moral intuition, or moral sense, or moral instinct, or moral palate; in every man there is light enough to enable him to make a discrimination, a distinction, some line of division between things he may approve and things he may reject. In some men the light shines like the sun through the murky vesture of November gloom. In other men it is like the light from clear Italian skies. In some the moral light struggles through coarse vestures and thick, heavy, primitive, imperfect judgment. In others the light shines through more refined organs, upon receptive judgments which have been prepared by long culture. I am not quite sure whether we ought ever to speak of 'the education of conscience'; perhaps we should be nearer the truth by speaking of the education of judgment. We are not educating the light when we improve our windows, when we substitute glass for horn, and fine glass for knotted glass, and clean glass for glass that is smeared with dirt. I say this is not educating the light, it is refining the minister of reception. And perhaps in the moral life it is our receptive agents or judgments that need to be refined, and the moral light will stream through in more glowing radiance. But here is the primary matter; in all men there is some light, some sense of right and wrong, and therefore the possibility of heroism or cowardice.³

(1.) However small and however weak he may

¹ R. J. Campbell, *A Faith for To-day*, 86.

² C. H. Parkhurst.

³ J. H. Jowett.

be, yet man has that which puts him above sun, and moon, and stars, and all the vast bodies, and all the enormous forces of the universe, simply because he can do right, and can do wrong, and they cannot. Their greatness, in reality, is enhanced by his, and not his by theirs. When a dreadful earthquake convulses a whole country, the only thing which gives it importance is, that it has brought destruction and misery and sudden terror on a vast number of human beings. If a planet were to be burnt up before our eyes, the only thing which would make it more than a stupendous spectacle would be, that it should have been inhabited, like our own, by creatures with souls. If the sun were to be blotted out, the chief importance of the change would be found in its effect on human life. With all the greatness of all these things, man made in the image of God is greater still.

(2.) Man is great even in his sin. It is only a great being who can sin. Satan had never been an angel of darkness had he not first been an archangel of light. The creation of a devil, as such, is theologically, morally, philosophically impossible. Man had never been a sinner if his origin were low, his very sin speaks the greatness of his moral origin. It is because we were created with the greatest of all powers, the power of a will free; it is because we were endowed with the greatest of all gifts, an individual personality; it is because we were created with the greatest of all privileges, the privilege of self-government, self-determination at the turning-points of life, that makes it possible for us to sin. The tree may grow up tall and stately, it is beautiful, but not virtuous; it may grow up twisted, dwarfed, mis-shapen, it is a pity; but it is not a sin, for it is not endowed with personality, it is not free to choose and determine for itself; it is the product of resistless necessity; we look at once for outside influences to account for its misfortune. The animal may be vicious and do much harm, it is not a sin. But because man has these free self-governing faculties, because he can think and reason, because he has that moral sense which is called conscience, because he can distinguish between right and wrong, between ought and ought not, because he can choose the right or the wrong, his declination from the right is not misfortune, it is sin.⁴

⁴ R. Mackenzie.

It is a great thing to be endowed with a talent for becoming bad. Weathered rock may become disintegrated but without changing its quality, but when we come up into the higher existence of the plant, and, still more, of the animal, decay means for it something offensive, gruesome, and the decayed body can be so repulsive because the living body is so beautiful. In the same way, sin looks both ways, up and down, just as far towards heaven as it does towards hell. A dog cannot sin, poor dog. He is not fine enough to be able to drop so low. So a faculty for sinning, for lying, for becoming vile is one of our greatest features of genius, one of the supreme tributes to our natural estate of exaltation. A dog obeys every law of the realm he is created into. He does not trespass; he cannot trespass. He cannot apostatize; he is not capable of falling from grace. Unhappy brute! It is infinitely better to be a wicked man than to be an innocent hyena. We ought to be prepared to thank God that we are so wondrously endowed as to be able to break the commandments.¹

3. Look at his limitless possibilities in *Affection*. Take your questions why God is mindful of humanity into the sick-room, where a little one lies stretched in weakness and weariness and pain, and watch the mother minister there day and night, becoming almost independent of sleep, never tired, or never confessing it, giving out her very life drop by drop, drop by drop. Or go into the law-court with your question, and see the husband charged by the police with abusing his wife, and see the wife become the advocate for her husband, affection welling up like a spring in the desert sands; you may choke it, but it flows again! Or take your question further afield, and see the noble service of man for man. Go among the lepers in Samoa or in Almora, and mark the men who have laid down everything that is accounted pleasant and worthy, and who have gone to stand between these sons and daughters of affliction and the fierce wind that continually beats upon them.²

Let me remind you for one thing that in that world which is nearest to us, in which we live—in the kingdom of love—mere size does not count; the foot-rule is an impertinence. You ask a mother, for example, to measure a child in inches. You say to the mother that the house is bigger than the baby and of more importance. No doubt it is bigger, but if the baby were as big as the house perhaps the mother would not love it quite as much, for in love's arithmetic it is sometimes the very frailty, the littleness of the object, that makes love most tender. Yes, a little thing of flesh and blood that cannot talk nor stand erect, nor know its mother's face, and yet if you put the Himalayas in one scale and the child in the other, in love's logic the child outweighs the mountains.³

4. To this dignity of mind derived from its power of thought we have to add its value in the light of *immortality*. Though the material universe as a whole will never cease to exist, it is yet subject in every part to change and decay, while the soul lives on, unaltered in conscious identity, binding the present to the past, and the future to the present, in a continuous chain for ever. If there be in matter, as we look up through the worlds, what seems an infinite of *space*, there is in mind a real infinite of *time*, and a power of growth in thought and feeling and enjoyment, which consists not, like the growth of matter, in alternate birth and death, but in an evermore living life, welling upward, and swelling outward, in approach to the infinite and ever-blessed God. We may agree with Augustine, who says, 'There is but one object greater than the soul, and that one its Creator'; and we may reason very fitly, that if it was worthy of God to create such a being at first, it is worthy of Him to care for it afterwards, and to seek its progress and happiness with all the means at His disposal, that is, with a power and wisdom and goodness which are unlimited.

In the very last volume that came from Tennyson's hands, the last poem but one, 'God and the Universe,' he is facing that problem, he sees these infinite star spaces, he feels himself that time is a speck in an infinite universe, and he questions whether he can live, whether there is any space or any God for him, and he puts his question and the answer in these six memorable lines:

Will my tiny spark of being wholly vanish in your deeps
and heights?

Must my day be dark by reason, O ye Heavens, of your
boundless nights,

Rush of Suns and roll of systems, and your fiery clash
of meteorites?

Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human
state,

Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which
alone is great,

Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent
Opener of the Gate.

2. **Man is greater than Nature because he is nearer God.**—To man as made in the image of God, and, above all, as man is seen in his ideal glory in the person of Him who was at once Son of Man and Son of God, there pertains by its very essence the potentiality of an inner elevation and nobleness transcending far all the grandeur of the material creation. Regarded in his intelligent, and, above all, in his moral and spiritual nature, man is no

¹ C. H. Parkhurst. ² J. H. Jowett.

³ W. H. Fitchett.

longer the helpless slave, but the Lord, of nature, made to have dominion o'v' it, to subdue and subordinate it to the ends of his higher being and destiny. If he only realize and lay hold of his spiritual birthright, he need no longer remain the bewildered spectator of an awful and impassive material order, no longer feel himself in the grasp of a blind necessity, abandoned to the power of indiscriminating forces and laws. As related to God and the things unseen and eternal, he is in a sense enfranchised from the dominion of nature; sharer in a life that transcends the sphere of time and sense, possessor of a freedom which rises above all material limits, crowned with an immeasurably greater than all material glory. 'Thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.'¹

The Stoic of old would remind his disciples that they carried about a god enshrined in their hearts. Even as a vague surmise, a highly-wrought metaphor, the expression of the unsatisfied spiritual yearning, this teaching was very far from inoperative. What may it not be to you to whom it is an assured truth, to you who have been re-stamped in Christ with the image of God, to you who have been re-consecrated as the temples of the Spirit.²

When up to nightly skies we gaze,
Where stars pursue their endless ways,
We think we see from earth's low clod
The wide and shining Home of God.

But could we rise to moon or sun,
Or path where daily planets run,
Still Heaven would spread above us far,
And earth remote would seem a star.

This earth with all its dust and tears
Is His no less than yonder spheres;
And raindrops weak, and grains of sand,
Are stamped by His immediate hand.

The rock, the wave, the little flower,—
All fed by streams of living power
That spring from one Almighty Will,—
What'er His thought conceives fulfil.

We view those halls of painted air;
And now Thy presence makes them fair;
But nearer still to Thee, O Lord,
Is he whose thoughts with thine accord.³

1. God is mindful of us and visits us. (1) '*Thou art mindful of him,*' says the Psalmist. That Thou hast condescended to hold communion with this Thy frail and sinful creature; that

¹ John Caird. ² J. B. Lightfoot. ³ J. Sterling.

through long ages Thou didst school him to an ever fuller knowledge of Thee; that even in the darkest times and among the most degraded peoples Thou didst not leave Thyself without a witness, speaking through the promptings of the conscience, speaking through the courses of the seasons, speaking through the hopes and fears of the present; that Thou didst single out one man, one family, one nation to be the depository of Thy special revelation; that Thou didst guard and preserve this nation through unparalleled vicissitudes, so that, exiled, enslaved, crushed, trampled under foot, it revived again and again; that Thou didst from time to time commission Thy special messengers—lawgiver, psalmist, prophet, priest—to renew the flame of truth on the altar of Thy chosen race; and that thus Thy revelation burst out ever and again with a clearer, brighter light, and Thy Divine economy broadened down from precedent to precedent, till at length the religion of a nation should become the religion of the world.

Our doctor said, 'Poor little dear!
Nurse, I must do it to-morrow; she'll never live thro' it,
I fear.'

Emmie had heard him. Softly she call'd from her cot
to the next,
'He says I shall never live thro' it. O Annie, what
shall I do?'
Annie consider'd. 'If I,' said the wise little Annie,
'was you,
I should cry to the dear Lord Jesus to help me, for,
Emmie, you see,
It's all in the picture there: "Little children should
come to me."'

'Yes, and I will,' said Emmie, 'but then if I call to the
Lord,
How should He know that it's me? such a lot of beds
in the ward!'
That was a puzzle for Annie. Again she consider'd
and said:
'Emmie, you put out your arms, and you leave 'em
outside on the bed—
The Lord has so *much* to see to! but, Emmie, you
tell it Him plain,
It's the little girl with her arms lying out on the
counterpane.'⁴

(2) *And that 'thou visitest him'*—this was the fact best known to David. He knew but comparatively little of astronomy, but he knew much about God's thoughtfulness concerning man, and His visits to the sons of men. The one great

⁴ Tennyson, 'In the Children's Hospital.'

truth, more certain than all other facts to David, was that God was mindful of him—'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want,' etc. That was the underlying truth on which David based his creed and built up his life. Thus he starts here: 'God is mindful of me; that I know. O Lord, when I consider the heavens and remember that they are but the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, all of Thine ordaining, what honour, what dignity Thou hast conferred upon me that Thou shouldst spend so much thought in heaven over me, and that Thou shouldst bestow so much of Thy love and attention upon the sons of men.' That is the crowning wonder expressed here. Over and above the consciousness of the insignificance of man comes the triumphant assurance that God does not treat him as insignificant, but has conferred upon him infinite honour by the loving thought He cherishes concerning him, and the gracious visits He grants him. This is the conception to which David gradually rises through the medium of the former one of conscious insignificance, and this is the conception which finds a crowning expression in this utterance of twofold wonder. David could never have wondered so much concerning the dignity conferred upon man, apart from the preceding consciousness of human insignificance.

2. He is mindful of us in the gift of His Son; He visits us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most beautiful pictures in the whole range of ancient poetry is when the hero of Troy stretches out his arms to embrace his infant son before he moves to the field of battle. The child shrinks from him in fear, 'scared by the dazzling helm and nodding crest,' and the tenderness of the father's heart comes out with a touch of nature that makes us feel it beating across three thousand years:

He hastened to relieve the child,
The glittering terrors from his brows unbound,
And placed the gleaming helmet on the
ground—
Then kissed the child.

And shall we not deem it reasonable that the God who placed paternal pity in the heart of man feels it, and will take His own way of making us feel it also? When we are ready to be crushed by the overwhelming greatness of that starry

diadem, there must be some assurance given of God's compassion that shall open for us the door of filial confidence to His heart. Were it not for this, how cold and stern would every night come, with its awful lights looking down distant and silent on a world of sin and graves! Its thousand eyes would glitter pitilessly on our misery, and its fixed cycles would be coiled round us, like chains of despair. The arms of omnipotence would be dreadful if there were no throb of mercy in the breast.

Thou art the mighty God!

This gleaming wilderness of suns and worlds

Is an eternal and triumphant hymn

Chanted by Thee unto Thine own great self!

Wrapt in Thy skies, what were my prayers to
Thee!

The gospel is the answer to this, and the only sufficient answer. When we fall as dead at the feet of Him who has 'in his right hand the seven stars,' and whose countenance is 'as the sun shining in his strength,' He lays His hand on us, and says, 'Fear not,' and when we look up we meet the face of Jesus Christ.¹

(1) 'That thou visitest him.' That Thou didst effect this change by a signal manifestation of Thyself; that in the fulness of time, when Egyptians, and Assyrians and Persians, when Greeks and Romans had prepared the way, Thou didst of Thine infinite mercy send Thine only Son upon earth; that He was born as a man, lived as a man, suffered and died as a man; and that thus by this one act of marvellous condescension, humanity was redeemed, was exalted, was sanctified, 'That thou hast visited him.' Not only that this Thy blessed Son lived and died as a man; but that as a man He rose from the grave, and thus as a man won for men the victory over sin and death; that, as a man, He ascended into the heaven of heavens, the first-fruits of the final triumph of mankind, the earnest of the glorious consummation of all human history, when His brother-men united in Him shall wear His crown, and reign with Him as kings for ever and ever. Lord, what is man—this speck in boundless space, this moment in infinite time, this frail, fleeting helpless creature, this insignificance, this nothing—that Thou hast ordained him to such unspeakable glory?

¹ John Ker.

The ultimate greatness of man springs from his union with Christ through faith. Christ, having paid our ransom, was raised from the dead, received up into heaven, and is set on the throne of power; on that throne He appears in the transfigured nature of a man. It were easy to find men to-day in the lowliest places of the earth, degraded creatures, bearing scarcely the semblance of a man; but we can rise in the scale of manhood from that low level until our eyes rest on that representative Man on the throne in heaven, and these two are vitally connected. When we accept Him as our Saviour and our Lord He takes us up into fellowship, friendship, kinship with Himself. He is not ashamed to call us brethren. 'To as many as received him to them gave he power to become sons of God.'¹

(2) This is the assurance of man's dominion. It is not without significance that a Christian writer in the New Testament has amplified the old answer in the light of the fuller revelation of God in Christ Jesus. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews discusses David's childlike apprehension of man's position, and points out that it was hard to uphold in the face of advancing experience. David was content with an assertion of the fact of man's dominion; he could not indicate the method of that dominion or its extent. He asserted in the simplicity of his faith, 'Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet.' The New Testament writer pauses and says, 'But now we see not yet all things subjected to him.' Man's primacy could no longer be merely asserted; it must be felt and proved. And the proof was there: 'We behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour.' We see 'the author of our salvation made perfect through sufferings.' Yes, the life and death of Jesus was the eternal glorification of the life of man, was the justification of all man's claims to greatness, was the never-failing source of human dignity.

Now, what do we find in the story of the Incarnation? We see God coming into close and continuous contact with

¹ R. Mackenzie.

man. 'Thou *visitest him*,' was all the Psalmist could say. David's son, Solomon, asked a question, 'Will God in very deed *dwell* with man on the earth?' That question was asked by him when he dedicated the Temple to God, and God answered it in the Incarnation—'Immanuel, God with us.' When God became incarnate He touched human life anew and identified Himself with man in his fallen condition. Every power of nature became submissive to that man Christ Jesus. Man who, at the beginning, was made to have dominion over the works of God's hands, once more found a new representative in the perfect man Christ Jesus, to whom all power was given in earth and in heaven. It was because He had that power that He gave His disciples the commission to go forth into all the world.'²

3. The question, What is man? suggests another inquiry, What ought man to be? The answer has been suggested by the Epistle to the Hebrews. The writer tells us to see in Jesus Christ the true ideal of humanity, and he teaches us to find in His life the pattern of our own. The Christian life is the Christ-life. In every true Christian the words of the Apostle find their expression and their fulfilment, 'Not I, but Christ liveth in me,' 'To me to live is Christ.' St. Augustine has beautifully said that the sum and substance of religion is to imitate Him whom you worship. In this imitation lies the only evidence that we are worshipping in spirit and in truth.³

How great is little man!
Sun, moon, and stars respond to him,
Shine or grow dim,
Harmonious with his span.

Thou heir of all things, man,
Pursue the saints by heavenward track;
They looked not back;
Run thou, as erst they ran.

Little and great is man:
Great if he will, or if he will
A pigmy still;
For what he will he can.⁴

² D. Davies.

³ Archbishop Maclagan.

⁴ C. G. Rossetti, *Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims*.