

ARTICLE V.

THE INCARNATION.

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THE incarnation of God in Christ Jesus is the most stupendous declaration of the Bible. God, a spirit that inhabiteth eternity, whom the heavens cannot contain, whose divine presence is in the flaming glory of the rosebush, and the majesty of whose splendor is among the stars, the Almighty, Eternal, Invisible God, opens the doorway of his kingdom, steps out from his eternity, lays aside his garments of light, clothes himself in human flesh, and walks among men like unto one of us. This is the monumental miracle of the ages. Over it a war of centuries has been waged. To the Jews it has ever been a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles foolishness; but to them that believe, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. And why should this be counted a thing incredible? Is there anything too hard for the Lord? If God wishes to thus manifest himself, is there any man who will say he cannot and he shall not? If God sees that men need just such a revelation of himself, does that not constitute positive proof that he will give it?

It is my purpose here to present some arguments for the incarnation of our Lord, drawn from a source which has always been conceded to have great weight as evidence for spiritual truth. I refer to the realm of nature and to the various departments of our ordinary life. It has long ago been brought to our attention that when we find a principle

or law running throughout nature and in all departments of our earth-life, that that same principle or law obtains in the spiritual realm. Every natural law is an avenue that leads us on through nature, through life, through the spirit realm, to the very throne of God. As John Stuart Mill has said, "When the analogy can be proved, the argument founded upon it cannot be resisted." This is almost intuitively accepted by men as a true statement of fact. When, for example, we discover in the natural world that every seed brings forth its own kind, and only its own kind, we assume at once that in the spiritual realm, also, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Upon this idea Butler based his "Analogy," and Drummond his "Natural Law." Each of these constitute unanswerable arguments for the principles they enunciate.

With these things in mind, therefore, we submit the following proposition; namely, the analogies of an incarnation are found in all nature and in every department of life, and therefore are to be expected in the spiritual revelation of God. Let us have a clear understanding of the term "incarnation." God is a spirit. Jesus Christ was that spirit materialized, clothed in human flesh, taking human form. We do not, of course, presume to think of nature as a spirit materialized. The soul of the Christian revolts at any and all forms of Pantheism; and, besides, we need not its testimony. For what is the incarnation of Christ? In him the virtues of God are visualized, the love of God is crystallized, the invisible is made visible, the abstract is made concrete, truth is embodied and lives before us. God, the Infinite Spirit, steps down from the throne of his glory, enters upon the plane of life in which men live, and thereby makes it possible for us to appreciate his worth and find in him an understandable and usable

factor in the world's life. These statements are important. They express a principle which in its varying forms is found in all nature, and therefore nature itself is a witness to the truth of the incarnation of our Lord.

We submit the following evidence to substantiate our claim.

THE UNIVERSE A MATERIALIZATION OF THINGS INVISIBLE.

1. *A physical reality.* The present scientific theory of the beginning of the universe is summed up in the expression "nebular hypothesis." We do not here contend for its truth. However, we know that God takes six months to make a squash, a hundred years to make an oak, and five thousand years to make a sequoia of the Yosemite. If it be true that he took uncounted ages to make a universe, we shall enter no protest. We cannot see that it belittles him nor runs counter to fundamental theology. Nay, even though the more recent electron conception, which, without contradicting the nebular hypothesis, goes still farther back into the beginning of things, should eventually prove to be correct, we have nothing to fear; for, in either case, we have before us the scientific conception of God's *modus operandi*; and therefore we can say to the scientist, "You have furnished us with an argument for the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus."

For, upon this basis, what is our universe? All matter, every atom of it, was once an invisible gas. The universe, then, originally an invisible gas, is now that same gas, which has taken upon itself body and form. In its nebular condition we could neither have appreciated its grandeur, understood its nature, have grasped its significance, nor have comprehended its relation to us and our relation to it. It was necessary for this nebulous gas to come down to the plane of life in which men live. It must become solid earth. It must

come into the realm of life, where we may feel at one with it. It has done that very thing. The unknowable has become knowable. The abstract has been made concrete. It has embodied itself in a planet. It has stepped out from the throne of its glory, laid aside its garments of light, and walks before us in the simplicity and beauty of nature's own loveliness. Therefore we dare to assert that any man who accepts these things as true should have no trouble in believing in the possibility of an incarnate God.

2. *A materialization of God's thought.* Whether the worlds were created in a moment of time or whether through the slow process of uncounted ages, in either case the universe is a thought of God. His mind is builded into its beams and rafters. His wisdom is embedded in its foundations. His thought is enshrined in every nook and cranny of this mighty temple. The universe, complete, entire, wanting nothing, once existed only as a thought. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the worlds were made, they existed in clear, decisive lines in the mind of God. Then one day he, whose mighty power is able to subdue all things unto himself, molded his thought into the splendor on which we gaze to-day. And as we look upon the bewildering beauty of the midnight sky, the whispering stars reveal their secret to us, "We are a thought of God, materialized, visualized, clothed in beauty, baptized in power."

If God can thus materialize his thought, may it not well be believed that he can also incarnate his spirit?

3. *A materialization of truth.* We are coming more and more to understand that things that are natural are types and symbols of things mental and spiritual. To this our Scriptures agree by declaring that the "invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being under-

stood by the things that are made." The Old Testament is crammed with symbols and metaphors drawn from nature for the interpretation of spiritual truth. Every prophet seeking to lift his countrymen to higher realms of thought and life leads them on "through Nature up to Nature's God." The same is true of the New Testament, while we all recognize that the world's Great Teacher was especially gifted in "finding sermons in stones, and every bush aflame with God." To this testimony of the Scriptures agree the great thinkers.

It is Young who says, "Nature is the glass reflecting God as the sea reflects the sun, too glorious to be gazed on in his own sphere." So Chapin, "All nature is a vast symbolism. Every material fact has sheathed within it a spiritual truth. Hill and valley, seas and stars, are but stereotypes of Divine ideas." And Coleridge, "All visible things are emblems. Matter exists only spiritually to represent some idea and body it forth." Drummond says, "The temporal is the husk and framework of the eternal. The material universe is the scaffolding of the spiritual." Robert Louis Stevenson expresses it by calling a fact of nature "the double of some spiritual truth," while Oliver Wendell Holmes speaks of them as being "as like as a pair of twins."

These statements hardly need argument. To them all rational minds agree. The preacher ransacks heaven and earth for sermonic illustrations. All literature is bathed in similes, metaphors, emblems, and analogies drawn from nature. All our conversation is interlarded with them. To express an abstract thought the mind instinctively turns to nature for a suitable representation, well knowing it is there and needs only to be discovered. "Picturesque language," according to Emerson, "means that he who employs it is a man in alli-

ance with truth and God. Hence good writings and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. And with these forms, the spells of persuasion, the keys of power are put into his hands." All of which is confirmatory of the fact that nature is truth materialized, truth taking upon itself the likeness of earth and sea and sky and the things that are therein. If therefore intellectual and spiritual truth may be thus embodied, is it too much to expect that Eternal Truth may become Incarnate Truth?

We believe we have shown that the universe is a threefold witness to the Incarnation, and incidentally we have also demonstrated that the universe is a trinity of matter, thought, truth, these three, and these three are one.

THE VEGETABLE KINGDOM.

Come we now to things about us. Processes are going on before our very eyes which, at the least, are symbols and representations of an incarnation. What is a garden of flowers? a field of clover? a grove of trees? They are things invisible made manifest. They are certain hidden virtues of the natural world materialized in vegetation. Hear an allegory. I am standing at Creation's morn. The earth is under my feet. As yet upon its surface there grows no vegetation of any kind. I am hungry. God comes to me. I tell him of my hunger. And he says, "I have filled the ground and the air and the water and the sunlight with untold quantities and uncounted varieties of good things to eat." But I answer, "Ah, Lord God, I cannot see anything. Such food is not for me. I cannot feed on air. I cannot eat the sunlight. Water does not satisfy my hunger. I cannot swallow this earth. How sayest thou, then, these things are good for food?" His only reply is, "Wait a moment. Be still, and know that I am God."

And he speaks to the ground, "Reveal thy hidden life to this man." And then, as if he were summoning a cohort of angels, he calls to the seemingly empty air, "Nitrogen, come, I want you," and to the clouds, "Vapor, bring thy secret self to me," and to the sky, "Sunbeam, I need you." And, swifter than the wings of the morning, they come and stand beside their Maker. Their faces are veiled. Their forms I cannot see. And again his voice speaks, "Make yourselves manifest to this man." And, miracle of God! Ay, a miracle now as when first the morning sun looked upon the wondrous sight. Silently, but as resistlessly as the coming of the spring-time, these "inanimate spirits," if you please, take body and form before my very eyes, and stand before me clothed in living green. These change to robes of yellow, and from their pockets they bring forth handfuls of golden grain, and hand it to me, saying, "Take and eat." Knowest thou not that a loaf of bread has come down from God out of the sky? Why, then, cannot we believe that the Living Bread came down from heaven? Is not the whole vegetable kingdom a testimony to the fact of the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus? Every tree and plant and vine and bush and flower and spear of grass, the wheat-fields of a thousand generations,— every form of vegetation — is a concrete manifestation of things invisible.

Come with me again. It is sunrise on this planet in some far-distant past. The human race is not yet created. God is explaining to the angels the mystery of his purposes in creation as a preparation for the ultimate coming of man to this world. He explains the particular kind of being he shall be, the manner of his earth-life, his many and varied needs. And one of the angels says, "Then, Lord, they will need fire. They will need it for many, many things." And his answer

is, "Yea, I know it." Then turning his face toward the sun, that white-hot bonfire of the skies, he says, "Sun, embody thy heat." And the fierce and fiery flames cease their fury, lay aside their robes of splendor, and with quiet gentleness take upon themselves the flaming beauty of tropic vegetation. Then one day, old and feeble, they lay them down to die. And as God once dug a lonely grave in the land of Moab for Moses, his servant; so now, with brooding tenderness, he buries these plants and trees, and covers them deep with the soil of a thousand ages. But even as he buries them he declares to the angels, "I will not leave them in the grave. I will not suffer them to see corruption." And to-day we are opening ten thousand graves of these long-buried trees and plants. We call them coal mines. And our food is cooked, our houses are warmed, our factories are run, and world-progress has been made possible by the materialized sunlight of a long-forgotten age.

THE MINERAL KINGDOM.

On the mountain side is a huge boulder. It can be broken into fragments, pounded into powder, subjected to intense heat, be converted into invisible gases, and disappear from our view forever. But if we had the power of an omnipotent God, we could call it back from its oblivion, and build again with minute exactness the same boulder and place it again on the mountain side as God himself once did in days of yore. And this is only one of a thousand illustrations of the fact that all minerals and metals, though once they were invisible gases, are now condensed and crystallized into their various material forms. But I need not add words. My meaning is clear. The mineral realm is but the manifestation of things unseen. Metals have come to us from a world invisible, en-

tered upon the plane of life in which men live, and have become thereby an important and forceful factor in the world's life.

THE ANIMAL KINGDOM.

The whole animal creation is a manifestation of unseen forces and qualities which have taken upon themselves the likeness of physical form. Invisible things have been materialized and made alive. Whatever may be the true explanation of the origin of species or the beginnings of animal life, the principle of a physical materialization of invisible powers must necessarily be true. When, also, we remember how God has lifted a handful of dust to the glory of flesh and blood and incorporated it into a human body, most wonderfully made, does it not suggest to us the possibility of even greater works than these? And are we not assured that a Diviner incarnation than that has really taken place in every man? For what is a man? A body? Nay. A man is a soul, an incarnated spirit. A man is as invisible as God is invisible. I do not have a soul. I am a soul. If, therefore, every man is a spirit incarnated in flesh, why should it be unbelievable that Jesus the Christ was the incarnation of the supreme and infinite Spirit?

THE REALM OF THE WORLD'S WORK.

Everything that man's hand has wrought is but the bodying forth of some man's thought. Thought is as invisible as God, as intangible as a spirit, as real as flesh and blood. It has in it the mysterious power of materializing itself in wood and stone and iron and such like. As the universe is a thought of God crystallized in matter, so is a palace the materialized thought of a man. A great engineer originates a

thought, molds it into iron girders, concrete arches, stone buttresses, steel turbines, and vast machinery, and throws a twenty-seven-million-dollar dam across the Mississippi, and thereby establishes the greatest hydro-electric power dam on this planet. Another looks with wistful eyes across a narrow strip of land that separates two great oceans, and then crystallizes his thought into a five-hundred-million-dollar canal that changes the navigation routes of the world.

A certain man whose thought was born with wings made it into an aeroplane. A musician sat in his room while the moonlight fell around him, and a thought, exquisite in beauty, issued from his soul's inner chamber. The musician caressed it with his fingers as he passed it over the piano keys, and afterward he transcribed it into musical notes and gave it body and form. And Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" is with us unto this day. An artist dreamed. The dream was embodied in canvas and pigment, and Raphael's Madonna became the model for the artists of three hundred years. What is the American Republic? A vision, embodied in government and life. What is our educational system? A thought, molded into buildings and books and human lives. The multiplied philanthropies of the day, what are they? A heaven-born idea taking shape in hospitals, asylums, and homes for the aged, the orphan, the poor, and the outcast. All the works of man's hands, what are they? Embodied thoughts. Dreams come true. Visions materialized.

If, therefore, a man has power to thus embody his thoughts, materialize his dreams, crystallize his visions, into brick and mortar and stone, into engines and wheels, into songs and poems and pictures, why should it be a thing incredible that God the Almighty should incarnate himself in human flesh?

THE REALM OF TRUTH.

The incarnation of God in Christ meets a fundamental need of the human intellect, namely, simplicity. Simplicity is the first essential in the teaching of truth. Truth, in order to become the common property of the race, must be clothed in language and style adapted to the common man, even the ignorant and unlearned. To say of any man's address or sermon or book, "It is so profound I do not understand him," is no compliment at all. When we listen to a speech of high-sounding and ambiguous words, we are sometimes prone to imagine that we cannot see the bottom because the water is so deep, when most probably it is because it is so muddy. When a man like Hegel confesses, at the close of his career, "Of all my pupils only one understood me, and he misunderstood me," he passes judgment on his entire lack of that wisdom which is first of all intelligible. "Simplicity," says an old proverb, "is the sign of truth." And simplicity is the first fundamental demand of the ordinary mind. Great thoughts, if they are to be effective, must be brought down to where people live. The excellence of the wisdom of a Faraday is especially appreciated when we note that, though he wrote on the most abstruse and difficult subjects, yet he wrote so simply that even a child could understand.

No man ever uttered greater truths than did Jesus. No man ever spoke more simply than did he. Truth needs not only to be presented in simple language. The mind also asks for pictures, illustrations, object lessons. Nothing lets in light on a subject like a story, a parable, or, better still, an actual representation of the truth to be presented. Jesus excelled in the use of the parable. "The Pilgrim's Progress" is crowned with the halo of immortality because it meets so completely this innate desire of the mind for concreteness.

The modern cartoon is so popular because it appeals to this fundamental principle of the intellect. It bodies forth a situation so vividly, so picturesquely, so concretely, that it is devoured with gusto by us all.

The moral of all this is that the mind is so constituted that truth, to be understood and appreciated, must be presented in simplicity, and, if abstruse, will be immeasurably assisted by a living representation thereof. This is perceived regarding,

1. *Intellectual Truth.* God's lever for lifting the world is truth. But the fulcrum on which the lever rests is always a man. It is easy to say, "Truth is mighty and will prevail," but it will not prevail until it clothes itself with the burning spirit of some man. If any truth is to become the heritage of the race, it must be baptized with some man's intensity of soul and earnestness of mind. It must become incarnated in a man. Columbus, Copernicus, Newton, Luther, Carey, — who were they? Each of them an incarnation of a great idea. In each of them a great truth was made alive, so that all the world wondered. And their ideas have been incarnated in the race, because first incarnated in them.

2. *Moral Truth.* Virtue, to be understood, to attract by its beauty, must be personified. No description given, no mere statements of fact, no pictures representing it in action, is so adequate a portrayal as to see it exemplified in a man or woman's everyday life. Moral integrity, business honor, cleanness of life, — these are vague terms until we have learned them through the lives of men and women. To be appreciated, the virtues must be incarnated in human lives.

3. *Spiritual Truth.* It has been well said, "One faithful Christian is doing more to explain Christianity than all the treatises on faith ever written." It was Hume, the infidel, who said, as a young man whose manner of life he knew well

passed him with a Bible under his arm, "There goes an argument for Christianity that I cannot answer." The greatest of all bulwarks for Christianity consists in the number of its genuine faithful believers, in whose lives are embodied its doctrines and precepts. In proportion as a man or a church incarnates these principles in life, in like proportion do they become living epistles of their truth and power.

Here we rest our case. We believe we have proven our proposition that analogies of the incarnation are found throughout all nature and in every department of life. Creation itself beareth witness thereto. The vegetable, mineral, and animal kingdoms furnish us with a myriad illustrations. The world's workshop is a treasure house of evidence, and every product of man's hand is aglow with this truth. The mental, moral, and spiritual realms each contribute its own full share of these analogies — analogies so numerous, so varied, so striking, so conclusive, that our only answer to their testimony must be "yea and amen." We stand at last before God, the greatest, profoundest subject that ever occupied the attention of man. Have we not a right to infer from all that has gone before that here also this principle will be found? A thousand questions throng to our minds concerning God. It is extremely necessary that we should know him, — know his character, his relation to us, his attitude toward us. Some would fain be content by calling him the World-Ground, the Absolute, the Unknowable, the Great First Cause. And doubtless all of these express profound truths, but, alas for us! such language is too high. We cannot grasp it. We ask for bread and are given a stone. It cannot satisfy the cravings of our souls. Our souls cry out for God, for the Living God, for a God with a heart. And he hears our cry. One day he sends us a letter, a long and

beautiful letter. It is known as the Old Testament. It tells us of God, his wisdom, his power, his holiness, his justice, his wondrous love. It tells us many things that we have hungered to know, and our hearts are strangely warmed and our spirits fed as we ponder over the message he has sent. But somehow it does not fully satisfy. Even yet there is confusion of mind. Something else we need. We do not know just what it is. But he knows. An object lesson! A living reality! For God's plan of salvation is adapted not to the wise only, but to the ordinary mind and the common man also. We need the actual image of himself in the person of a living man. And in the fullness of time he who supplies every need of man, sent forth his Son, born of woman, incarnated under the law. His name was Immanuel—God with us. He dwelt among us. He entered our homes. He sat at our firesides. He ate at our tables. He talked to us face to face. He taught us many beautiful things of the life that now is and of the things that shall be hereafter. But, chiefest of all, he taught us what God is. His teachings, his miracles, his holy life,—these revealed God to us as never before. But more than all these his life with men, his attitude toward them, his pity for the weak, his kindness to the erring, his forgiveness of insults, his gentleness toward the penitent, his unchanging love under all circumstances—and yet along with it unswerving hatred of sham and evil—all of these have given us in Christ Jesus our Lord, a perfect image of the One True God. For in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He was the express image of the invisible God. He that hath seen him hath seen the Father. He that knoweth him knoweth God. He was Deity incarnate. Upon this rock he has built his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.