

polemical, have been attributed to his pen. He loved work. It was his meat and drink. He might say with Hamlet :

“ Sure, He that made me with such large discourse
Looking before and after, gave me not
That capability and Godlike reason,
To fust in us unused.”

Never was he so happy as when busily engaged in his calling :

“ He bounded joyously to sternest work ;
Less buoyant others turn to sport and play.”

Let me conclude with an epigram taken from Laurence Humphry's “ Vaticinium de Roma,” which shows the opinion entertained by his contemporaries of the value of Bale's labours in the cause of truth :

“ *Plurima Lutherus patefecit Platina multa,
Quædam Vergerius cuncta Balæus habet.*”

It has been metrically rendered in this free way :

“ Luther a *host* of hidden things revealed,
Much Platina disclosed that shock'd the sight,
Somewhat Vergerius saw that lay concealed,
But Bale with piercing eyes drags *all* to light.”



The Modern Conception of God.

BY THE REV. W. ST. CLAIR TISDALL, D.D.

IN our own day, among Englishmen, and in a large measure among Europeans in general, there is a certain definite conception called up in the mind by the word “God.” Of course, it would not be correct to say that this conception is one and the same in every respect in all minds among us. To some the word is of much deeper and fuller meaning than to others. To true Christians the word is the name of One whom they know and love ; to others it recalls a Being of whom they have a certain vague notion, and that only. But, speaking generally, we may venture to say that at the present time the word conveys to our minds the idea of one Personal, Holy, Loving, Just, Merciful, Almighty, All-wise, Eternal Being, who is omnipresent in the universe which He has produced, which He upholds, and which He rules by that system of laws which we term

Nature. There are men among us, no doubt, to whom the word "God," they assure us, conveys no meaning; others to whom it embodies a mere hypothesis; others who think vaguely of "a Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." But, at least in this country, men have to empty their minds of the former and higher conception in order to reach this condition of mistiness, rather than conversely. The question which we wish to consider is the genesis of our now generally accepted clear and definite idea of God. Whence do we get it, and how do we know that it corresponds to a reality?

Some hold that the idea is innate, and doubtless much may be said in support of this view. This has been shown by many writers, including Minucius Felix. But the fact is that, while the idea of God's existence may be innate, history and experience agree in showing that our present conception of God is widely different from that held everywhere in ancient times, and still entertained by the majority of the inhabitants of Asia and Africa. In Homer, for instance, we find that *θεός* denotes not one God, but one of a large number of divinities, each of them a magnified man or woman, with *quasi*-human body, human appetites and passions, and at least some human needs. These deities are represented as fighting with material weapons against men in defence of certain favoured towns and tribes, giving wounds and even receiving them from human combatants, and then pouring out *ἰχῶρ*, if not blood, from their own veins. The citizen of one state could not expect aid from the gods of another. These gods were strange compounds of good and evil, in which evil generally predominated. None were perfectly good, some were almost perfectly bad. Turning to India, we find much the same phenomenon in Vedic times. Indra is bloodthirsty, and fond of the intoxicating *Soma*-juice: Dyaus is guilty of more than one serious crime. Mitra is a higher conception, and Varuṇa still more so; but the former already shows signs of becoming a mere Sun-god, and the character of the latter degenerates as time passes, even in those early days. The Avestic conception of Ahura Mazda is the highest, perhaps, in all ancient heathendom; but Persian dualism represents him as contending for 9,000 years against Anro Mainyuš. Ahura's spouse is his own daughter, Spenta Armaiti, and he himself is only one, though the chief, of the seven "Bountiful Immortals." The Odhin, Thor, and Freya of our own Northern ancestors were not very Divine, from our present point of view; nor was the Perkūn of the Slavs or the Ukko of Finland. Turning to philosophy, we find Confucius in China mentioning "Heaven" (*Tien* = God) only once in his works, unable to teach anything on that subject to a people who believed in a multitude of inferior deities, mostly malevolent. Buddha recognized no deity who could in any way help man to the attainment of Nirvāṇa, though he did not deny the existence of beings called gods by the popular religion. Modern Buddhism has gods, but they are certain rather vaguely conceived-of heavenly beings. Islām has borrowed the doctrine of the Divine Unity from Judaism and Christianity, and yet the Islāmic conception of Allāh is that of an Almighty tyrant, arbitrary and irresponsible, rather than anything higher. Philosophy in Islām, even among the lower classes in some countries, leads to the conclusion that

God is completely unlike any conception of Him that can occur to the human mind, and hence tends to Agnosticism. Even in orthodox Islâm the gulf between Allâh and His creatures is so unfathomable that in practice religion is largely made up of worship directed to dead men and women, supposed to have been favourites of His. Philosophical Hindûism is Pantheism, the Personality of God and all idea of the reality of moral distinctions between good and evil being thus lost. So in ancient Hellas, philosophy ended in Pyrrho's utter Agnosticism and the absurd semi-spiritualism of the Neo-Platonists. The highest expression of religion among the pious was the raising of altars "to the Unknown God."

It is clear, therefore, that our modern conception of God has not come to us through philosophy, ancient or modern. Nor have we learnt it from any Ethnic religion. The idea which we now have of Him may correspond with that which *should* be innate, and may thus, when once it has been formed in our minds, prove its genuineness—the seal fitting the imprint, though the latter is partially marred, partially obliterated. Yet that the innate conception, as such, is not now extant in its perfection is clear from our failure to discover it in any Ethnic faith or philosophy.

In spite of this, the conception is so generally accepted among us that it forms a serious obstacle to the proper translation of any Oriental work into English. If we render *Deva*, or *Parameshvar*, or *Tien*, or *Shang-Ti*, or any such term by the word "God," we are reading into the Eastern book our modern English conception, which is vastly superior to that of the author. Nay, more, in many respects it is absolutely different from the idea which he had in his mind. This will be evident if we render Tityrus' words in Vergil's First Eclogue: "O Melibœe, deus nobis hæc otia fecit," by "God gave us" instead of "A god gave us," etc. The difference between "A god" and "God" is enormous; and in the same way the gulf between the "God" of ancient philosophy and "God,¹ even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," cannot be bridged by any human effort.

The study of Comparative Religion has taught us that in ancient days it was only among the Hebrews that an idea of God was to be found which is in any degree worthy to be compared with the conception of God which we now have. Even among the other Semitic nations it is not to be discovered, in spite of the much earlier and higher civilization to which some of them attained. It is true that Assyrian and Babylonian hymns often show on the part of the worshipper the same spiritual *needs* which we feel, and the desire for help, forgiveness, reconciliation. But though the groping after God is there, the failure to find Him as He is makes itself equally manifest. Polytheism in some places gradually changes, at least in part, into Henotheism, but there is no conception of God's true Unity, still less of His Holiness. Among the Hebrews, doubtless through Revelation, God's Unity seems to have been recognized early. So, in a measure, were His Holiness and Justice. Hence Abraham says: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Yet his conception of God, though true in a very great degree, was far lower than ours. Therefore special means

¹ 2 Cor. i. 3, R.V.

were employed—and were evidently necessary—to teach him that human sacrifices, such as those offered by the nations among whom he dwelt, were not acceptable to God. To us, were the command given to offer one of our sons upon the altar, in a literal sense, it would appear incredible that such a command should have come from God, our conception of God being so much higher. One reason why the command was given to Abraham was to teach him to know God better than he then did. In the Old Testament we see how God gradually revealed Himself more and more clearly to His people. Yet, in spite of the Law and the Prophets, the fact that, long after Moses' time, Jehovah was represented in Israel by *calves* at Bethel and Dan, shows how very far from the truth was the conception of the Divine in the mind of the people at large. In the same way the *autos-da-fe* of the Inquisition prove how erroneous was the idea of God, even a few centuries ago, in the minds of the authorities of the Roman Church, in spite of the existence of the Gospel, then almost unknown to them.

If we analyze our thought of God to-day, we find that, at its highest, it *corresponds with the character of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is a very remarkable fact, which has not perhaps received the consideration which it deserves. Doubtless there are certain aspects of the Divine Nature which, at first sight, do not seem to be expressed, or at least emphasized, in our Lord's life and conduct—for instance, the justice which demands the punishment of sin. But a little consideration will correct this impression. In the condemnation of the barren fig-tree, and in the prediction of the fate of Jerusalem, this lesson is taught. Nay, more, in Christ's tears over the guilty city we see that God's justice is tender and compassionate, not stern and angry. And then we have the Lord Himself bearing our sins in His own body up to the tree, dying, the Just for the unjust. We find Christ judging men by offering them the light, and urging upon them its acceptance in every possible way except that of compulsion (which is unthinkable). He condemns none, except by the very act of seeking to save the lost, which gives those who love darkness rather than light the opportunity of pronouncing judgment (John iii. 19) upon themselves by rejecting Him. This method of judging men now seems to us manifestly the only absolutely just and yet the most merciful manner of acting towards sinners, and the only one which is consonant with what we know of God's character in other respects. Thus, on considering the matter thoroughly, we see that our conception of God is practically identical with the Gospel portraiture of Jesus Christ in character. Nay, more, the only Deity whom we men of the twentieth century can possibly worship is the God revealed to us in the Person of Christ. Our generation has to choose between the Divine Revelation made in the *Λόγος* and the surrender of all belief in a Personal God, a God whom we can in some degree know, and whom we can love because He first loved us. No one can really either love or worship an Unknown God, a Great Unknowable. Yet, as even such a non-Christian man of the world as G. de Molinari has pointed out,¹ at the present crisis in the history of mankind religion is even more necessary than ever before, since it is

¹ "Religion," p. 144.

“the only absolutely effectual agent in the development and preservation of the moral sense.”

Thus, nearly two thousand years after the coming of our Lord, our own experience proves the truth of such words of His as these: “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father”; “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” Moreover, this claim is verified as necessarily and absolutely correct by the whole religious history of the race. This obviously constitutes a new proof of the Deity of the Logos, Jesus Christ, and shows us why it is that “There is none other name under Heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”



The Missionary World.

BY THE REV. A. J. SANTER,

Formerly C.M.S. Missionary in Bengal.

WRITING to the *North India Gleaner* from Burdwan, the Rev. C. B. Clarke tells of an unusual occasion for the preaching of the Gospel. He says: “At Mankar, on New Year’s Day, they had a very interesting gathering. It was primarily a football club meeting, but Miss Harding (the Church of England Zenana missionary in charge) was asked to preside, and the Rev. K. C. Dey (the Bengali Pastor) was invited to make a speech. About two hundred people were present, and for some twenty minutes the Rev. K. C. Dey preached; the people stood to listen with the greatest respect and attention. It is surely a sign of the times when a Christian sermon is not felt to be out of place at a football meeting.” From the same source we learn that, when Miss Mulvaney, who laboured many years in Burdwan before taking up work among the friendless women of Calcutta, paid Burdwan a visit recently, “everybody was anxious to call on her. Nor did she go away empty-handed: her *Hindu friends* gave her some Rs.100 for her home.”



Surely parents may occasionally learn something from their children. A novel method of conducting a Sunday-school is reported from the C.M.S. Bhil Mission: “It was decided”—in an informal conference with the Bishop of Nagpore—“to try the experiment of holding the Sunday-school at the afternoon service for a year. The service is to be used only as far as the end of the lesson, . . . and the whole congregation is to separate into classes, which are all to learn the same lesson, and then meet as one body for the closing prayers. . . . All the scholars in each school will then be examined together in the lessons already learnt, and at the time of the parochial mission all the scholars of the schools are to be examined together. The great object to be gained is the teaching of all, old as well as young, men as well as women, in classes, as it was felt they would learn far more in this way than by merely listening to a sermon. Another advantage will be that the mothers will not be distracted by their children, who will be taught at