

### A Missing Divine Attribute.

**W**HATEVER we may think of the Old Testament now, there can be no possible doubt that many of the contributors to the Sacred Library, though centuries apart in time, had a clearer conception of God's Being in one respect than those who have explained much of it away. For the Divine attitude to Nature and to man stands out distinctly in these books, poems and prophecies and histories, as that of a living present factor in the affairs of the world. He was no absentee Landlord, or an occasional Intruder, but rather the most prominent Figure in all. He never said or did exactly the same thing twice, and yet He was for ever practically the same. The so-called Tribal Deity, nevertheless, from the very first spoke with a unique accent entirely His own, and while fundamentally and prophetically anthropomorphic, with the Incarnation steadfastly in view, and varying in His conduct with varying conditions of time and place and people, His character in essentials did not alter. And if clothed with human attributes and human weaknesses, yet He moved in a sphere of action immeasurably (*toto cælo*) removed from the petty and sordid batrachomachies and myomachies of men. Not that He was so much bigger and better than we, but a different sort of Being altogether, separated from us in kind even more than in degree, though of course there could be no intimate qualitative difference, because in that case religion and morality would have been impossible. But still He proved immediately accessible, while He bore no resemblance whatever to the artificial God of the Deists. A sociable, companionable, often audible and visible Presence, He adjusted Himself and His infinite stature and gigantic steps to the wants of the individual or the nation He was dealing with, while always retaining His Divine dignity and greatness. There appeared persistently in what He demanded and what He received a beautiful heavenly accommodation, without any compromise of eternal principles. He behaved, if we may express it in this way without any irreverence, as Science performs its experiments, by exhaustive inquiries in every conceivable direction, so as to eliminate the superfluous and insignificant. A good Comrade at the least which was also the sacrifice, a fellow soldier and yet always the Captain, He made

Himself felt equally in strife and peace, in festivals and fasts, in joy and mourning as the One absolutely necessary, without whom no campaign, no service, no ceremony, no action could be completed or successful. At home and abroad, in work and in play, the Israelite found his God a Friend in need and a Friend indeed. No doubt they were perpetually quarrelling, but this did not affect their intimate relations. *Amantium iræ amoris integratio est*, the quarrels of lovers are the renewal of love. It may be fairly questioned, whether the modern conception of the Divine Fatherhood is not in some respects less close than that of friendship. In the Old Testament the two parties seem to have chosen each other, while relatives possess no choice and must accept what they find. They might have chosen differently had they enjoyed the power. We seem confronted with the happy but rare combination of an unusual identification. The family was one of friends as well as relatives. God has become the inheritance of His people, and the people are His inheritance. They constitute a perfect equation. The reactions between the two were (and are) those of real religious life, when every act was religious and Church and State coincided. But in war the character of God emerged more conspicuously, and in war man reflected most faithfully that particular aspect.

In fact, most of the Old Testament writers had firmly and clearly grasped the Christ Conception of the Divine Immanence. They saw God in everything and everything in God, as Moses felt "the reproach of Christ" in Egypt. The clouds were His chariot, He rode on the winds, He talked by the trees, His path was the pathless ocean, and what were the Cherubim and the Seraphim, but the Forces of Nature carrying His messages in storm and thunder and lightning, now in destruction that was always reconstruction and now as ministering angels of mercy? This age of ours has at last, through the services of Science, adopted a capitulation to old ideas in a tardy recapitulation of their power and presence. The predominance, the reign of Law was as evident in Old Testament times as at the present day. But we have not improved upon it, by hypostatizing a pale and anæmic Abstraction. The Israelite of old put the Lawgiver first and the Law second, while we merely personify Law and give all the honour and credit to secondary causes. During the Old Testament period, the worshippers of Jehovah thought nothing too small for His purposes and His indwelling; they did

not only recognize His action in awful geological convulsions, in catastrophic changes and solutions of continuity, in earthquake and eclipse or overflowing inundations and outbreaks of volcanic energy. They beheld His movements everywhere, alike in the physical and spiritual planes. He inhabited the praises of Israel, the human heart, and no less the very dust under their feet. This was not mere crude Animism, but a progressive expansion of religious feeling and thought. Worshippers were conscious of the immediate Divine activity everywhere in heaven and earth. In those early days spiritual speculation was very wide awake; though the spiritual and the material were not divided then, it was very curious and inquisitive, but as simple as it was sublime. It made God even stoop to the stars, He was so far above them, but He stooped lower still—to the dust of the balance and insignificant creatures like the grasshopper and the ant. Every event, every creature, everything was directly referred to God as the Creator and Preserver of all. The relation of Himself to the world was immediate and unbroken, while we see Him diluted and minimised through the vague and hazy intermediaries of second causes. We do not pretend to know much about Reality; we have at the utmost a dim and distant, a bowing acquaintance with it, which is no better than glorified ignorance. The thing in itself for ever escapes us, mocks us, defies us. But what does one of the greatest living philosophers say, what does Benedetto Croce teach? He reduces everything finally to spirit, and he tells us different news. "Philosophy examining every part of the Real, has not found any place in which to lodge the unknowable in thought." The last word in modern metaphysics is a return to the naïve distinctive belief of the Old Testament. "Whoever admits something is unknowable, declares everything unknowable." For, as the same profound philosopher writes, "Thought thinks either all or nothing."

We are at the very first confronted by four tremendous facts, the Good, the True, the Beautiful and the Useful. And as these are the chief constituents of our psychological furniture, it stands to reason that we must expect to find them all in their perfection in God, who will be all of them alike. The only true measuring rod is anthropomorphism. We can but apprehend God, in terms of man. But, as a matter of history and experience, men have simply confessed and adored the first three attributes. They have not

in so many words, and in overt act and fact, acknowledged the Divine Usefulness. They may have thought it mean and even derogatory. Mozley in one of his great sermons says the cosmos faces us as a picture and as a machine. Now we have treated God more as a Picture. Worship, admiration, awe, reverence, have been offered up without ceasing to Heaven. But it is the Picture alone that we recognised and venerated. We placed God on a pedestal, and fell down before His stupendous Transcendancy. We ignored his Usefulness, unless like Jacob we made a bargain. This invaluable idea has been lost in the course of ages, though the Israelites understood it thoroughly and tapped (so to speak) its incalculable riches. They were a practical and business people and made every possible use of God. And this is exactly what He demands of us. He says virtually in all His revelations, "Do not only worship Me, but make use of Me, for I like to be used and My greatest pleasure consists in serving My creatures." "I am your Servant as well as your Sovereign." This does not imply the low huckstering spirit of Jacob when he made a covenant with God at Bethel—a purely commercial transaction. "If God be with me and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's home in peace—then shall the Lord be my God."

And so, everywhere in the Old Testament, we have the Creator offering His services freely to the men of faith and loyal lovers. He is never really absent from the arena of enterprise in whatever form, He is essentially a working God, the Divine Mechanic. Nothing appears too small, too obscure or squalid for His attention. He dwells in "no solitary grandeur"—*nulla virtus solitaria*—or on inaccessible altitudes. Heights and deeps are alike to Him, one and the same. The greatest honour men can pay Him is not worship, which indeed He accepts and appreciates, but to be employed by them as chief Actor and Protagonist in every undertaking. That constitutes God's supreme desire and delight. He does not so much ask for sacrifices, though He never disdains them, as for human burdens that He may bear and share with us. He is fundamentally a Giving rather than a Taking God, just as we are taught that it is more blessed (more Godlike) to give than to receive. At the present day during the extremity of War, we should let Him be our Captain and lay on Him the responsibility, and then the War

would soon be ended. His predominant wish is to be useful and to be granted the principal part of the onus of all and in all. But we first endeavour to do things ourselves and in our own blundering way, and only at the last take refuge in God as a *dernier ressort*. Essentially anthropomorphic as He is and was and ever will be, He reveals His Divinity most through His Humanity. The oldest story in the world is the Incarnation, not the Creation, for before that man was in God and Humanity constituted one of His attributes. Hegel at any rate thought so. God the Word became Flesh in the first man, and long before the birth of Christ we can behold the Incarnation energising through Godlike men and also betraying its presence in a perpetual Crucifixion for us. This the devout Israelite, who dwelt at the centre of things and not at the circumference as we do, before the divorce of intuition and reason among the mainsprings and ultimate sources, recognized at once. His genius for religion in its earliest and simplest forms, before the primitive and aboriginal instincts were obscured and perverted, enabled him to see and feel and know God, as we cannot with our uttermost intellectualism. With him God was everything and everywhere, above and below and around him, to serve and prosper him in each worthy effort

“To be the fair beginning of a time.”

Now we poor gropers after the Truth, we blind seekers, who have neither faith nor love, nor any spiritual faculty to apprehend Him, have lost God, as not merely our Creator and Preserver, but as Friend and Companion and working Partner in the business of life. He is no longer our true and one Yokefellow, and while we confess Him with our lips, we deny Him in our labours. There is no room for Him anywhere in our work. We discuss Him daily through the misty medium of secondary causes. We bow down to the Law and not to the Lawgiver—to mere symbols and counters and abstractions. We give Him grudgingly and nominally the first day of the week, and adore a pure hebdomadal Deity, whereas He wants to be our life partner, to meet the brunt and burden of all. To regain the lost Friend, the Supreme Servant, we must return to the fundamentals, to the elemental facts. There God stands at our side, waiting to be used, to bend His shoulders (so to speak) to any weight we choose to impose—a world at strife or a trampled worm. He displays no condescension, no pride, no atti-

tude of superiority, for the humblest thing in heaven and in earth; He is the Maker of both. "His tender mercy is over all His works." The majestic planet and the blade of grass rest alike on Him and share equally His regard. Coming to ourselves is the sole repentance required, coming to God is the sole necessary faith. But there we are surrounded by an infinite ocean of riches, the innumerable and inexhaustible Divine Usefulnesses, and we neglect them simply because we do not believe in them. We at present neither know ourselves, nor know Him, "whom to know is life eternal." If anything could awaken us from our death slumber, it should be this almost Universal War. This emerges at bottom as a conflict between Matter and Spirit, Gentleness and Force, Faith and Reason, Soul and Body. The light from the Altar fronts and combats the corpse candle of intellectualism—mere cleverness, mere cunning. Regeneration with its laver of fire is washing us in its furnace. And out of the awful crucible, the flames of trial, should arise not a golden calf, but a God or a Godlike Man, with a new and true, a simple and sublime Religion, that has been burned into him and will be a rod and a staff which will support by chastening—not a reed shaken with the wind and blown about by every breath of doctrine. Le Rochefaucauld said "*Ce n'est pas assez d'avoir des grandes qualités, il en faut avoir l'économie. La souveraine habilité consiste à bien connaître la prix des choses.*" We want a new, a living, a spiritual economy. The supply is ready and more than sufficient, but where is the demand? Christ Himself in this terrible War has been crucified afresh and daily put to an open shame. But, notwithstanding this, He offers Himself and His services too frequently in vain. Here and there souls in this awful extremity realise His Presence and receive His final blessing. Whether He appears visibly as the "White Comrade" or as a half visible Divine figure, He, who is and must be the Prisoner of Eternity, the Priest and the Vicarious Victim both in one, must continue His work as the Divine Drudge, pleading with us and fighting for us with the perpetual sacrifice of prayer. We hitherto have trusted too much in material aids, and they have their use and season now, during the agony of the present conflict. But they have no power, unless backed by the moral and spiritual sanction of faith and love. We must first come to ourselves and come to God through Christ and His Cross.

Theology settles nothing, it rather unsettles everything, because it is mainly critical and not creative. Melancthon knew this and lamented it, when he wrote that Christianity was honoured by "*Theologastrorum sententiis, de conscientia casibus, inextricabilibus, ubi nunquam non ex quaestione quaestio nascitur.*" No doubt it must ever be so. A question answered raises another question or more than one, and so we might go on in *infinitum*. But there exists another side and that a constructive side where inquiry ceases and becomes absurd, when reward fails to attract and punishment to coerce or intimidate. Hegel has summarily dismissed Compulsory Punishment in a few but scathing words of bitter mordant humour. He declares it to be a mere economic fact, by means of which the State or Judging Power opens business with goods called Crimes exchangeable for other goods, and the Code is the list of prices! But the sole pressure we may consider is the spiritual pressure of Religion, the sole sanction that counts first and last is the moral. And we must go to the Working Christ—"My Father worketh hitherto and I work"—for a practical present-day, universal Religion. "I see that all things come to an end, but Thy commandment is exceeding broad." The day of mere Forms and Ceremonies has passed for ever, and some teachers are now already trying to lay the foundations of a more spiritual service, in which all can meet and kneel together at one common Altar. The oldest symbol in the world, namely the Cross, contains or expresses all we want. We may mark it in every tree and in every hand-grip. "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me. My judgment was a robe and diadem." Far too long have we been denying the Usefulness of God! We must now make the great affirmation, and claim Him as the Brother born for adversity. He will prove now, if we allow Him the Divine opportunity, the best of War Mates and War Captains, and will lead us from victory to victory, till we are more than conquerors, and the Cross is stamped on every heart.

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