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The Evangelical Quarterly

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NATURAL REVELATION

IT is astonishing how little attention the problem of Natural Revelation receives at the hands of thinkers and writers at the present time. For this paucity of attention many influences may be held responsible. To many the matter appears self-evident; there is no real question to discuss, only certain facts to notice and enumerate. To others again the matter presents problems rather of theological detail than of broad general interest, and this is not the concern of the theologian averse to what he is pleased to consider barren speculation. To not a few the whole question smacks rather too strongly of a Scriptural theology, which, of course, will be remote from the situation *in actu* of modern life. To the majority, if the truth must be told, the whole matter has never been approached as a subject for study, because it has been approached with presuppositions already firmly entrenched. Natural Revelation is only too often a subject in which assumption decides rather than conscious deliberation. The average theologian comes with his attitude already decided: either it is an indispensable preliminary to the Revelation of Grace, or, perhaps, it is a mere delusion. In both cases the opinion will be more in the nature of a reaction than a considered judgment, and it may well be that the thinker has himself no clear conception of what is signified by the term which he so readily uses. May it not be, however, that this problem of Natural Revelation warrants far more attention than it is generally accorded? That while it may not be a vital problem, it is one of those matters, a right understanding of which is essential for a proper appreciation of Scriptural truth? And in any case is it not clear that to think or speak in terms of Revelation, whether of nature or of grace, without pausing to reflect what is implied, is a dangerous process, likely to lead to a perversion of any true understanding?

I

A first necessity in approaching the problem of Natural Revelation is to know exactly in our own minds what it is that is being discussed. In theology a vague terminology is always a hindrance and never a help, as the woolly, comprehensive formulae of agreements have abundantly testified. Vagueness is always more likely to mislead than to help. Particularly is this so in the case of Natural Revelation. Many writers make use of the term, or of some kindred term, especially in the construction of theological systems, in which it is essential, for example, to any theory of progressive revelation, and likely to impress as an idea of sound Scriptural association. But many writers who make use of the term, or of some obvious equivalent, immediately begin to speak of something which is not Natural Revelation at all. In some cases the confusion is evident from the outset, since they use the term interchangeably with some such term as Natural Religion or Natural Theology. Even where this is not the case, however, clearly this is the true connotation given to the term, Natural Revelation being taken to cover all the emotional and rational activity of man in his labours to construct philosophical and religious systems. The Natural Revelation which is the essential preliminary to the foundation of the Christian Revelation of Grace, is thus the philosophical and religious theorising of man—an appalling perversion which has led to the rejection of Natural Revelation entirely, construed in this fashion, by those who rightly contend for the absolute and divine character of the Christian faith. It is almost tiresome to point out, however, that this perversion, common though it is, has no real connection with Natural Revelation at all. Thinkers who take this line have never even begun to discuss Natural Revelation, however liberal a use they may make of the term. They are discussing Natural Religion. Just as for many the Revelation of Grace has been transmuted into the Christian religion, or the Christian thought about God, so too with the Revelation of Nature. Natural Revelation has been made into Natural Religion, or the thought of the natural man about God, to the obscuring of its true character as it is presented to us in the Scriptures.

Natural Revelation, we need to recognise this at the very outset, is not the so-called revelation attained by human reason

and intuition, the unveiling of God in His nature and character by the emotional or rational activity of man. Natural Revelation is not the thought of philosophers and religious leaders about God, nor is it a term which may be used to describe the various human systems. Traces of Natural Revelation may indeed be found in the religious systems and in the activity of man, but these themselves are not that Revelation, nor may they rightly be described as anything more than the sinful and distorted response of man to it. Far from being Natural Revelation, human effort is more often an obscuring and a perversion of it. The Revelation of Nature is something quite different and apart from the religious and philosophical activity of sinful man, although there may be times when the two coincide, when religion and philosophy find their starting-point or their support in the relics of an earlier revelation. The sum of the matter is this: That Natural Revelation is not a work, an activity, a striving of man at all. It is a gift. One might go further and say that it is a natural gift which has its place in the perfect creation of God. Nor was Natural Revelation gifted merely to form a basis for the later Revelation of Grace. Indeed in the majority of cases it may well be questioned whether it is of any value in this respect. The common conception of a human apprehension of God underlying the Christian Revelation is a dream of self-sufficient man in his heaven-storming pride and folly, but as an interpretation of Natural Revelation it is a dangerous and pernicious travesty.

II

The Revelation of Nature, and in this it resembles the Revelation of Grace, is always seen in the Scriptures as a Word of God to man, as distinct from a thought of man about God. It is the self-disclosing of God, that which God makes known to man of Himself. In this connection we must not be misled by the term natural, which seems to nullify the Divine character of this revealing act and to imply that here there is scope for the effort and operation of man. Natural Revelation is still Revelation, and that means that it is a Word which God Himself has spoken, and which none but God could speak. The term "natural" qualifies the Revelation, not by rendering the human response any the less subservient to the Divine act, but by placing this revelation in its proper setting, indicating the chan-

nels through which it is given and ascribing to it its proper function. As opposed to the special Revelation of Grace, Natural Revelation is something inherent in the world as God created it. It is the knowledge of God gifted to man in the natural circumstances of created life, through natural means, and in order that finite man might, not as a special favour, but as part of his destiny as a creature, enjoy fellowship with the Infinite Creator.

The peculiar character of the Revelation of Nature as opposed to that of Grace does not lie in its nature as Revelation, but rather in the circumstances which attend it, in its mode of operation and in its function. In general character both revelations are the same. Both are a Word of God to man; that is to say, both are a Divine self-communication by which the knowledge of God is imparted to man by God Himself. At this point there is no distinction of any kind, since in Creation and Redemption alike it is Jesus Christ who is the Word, the God who speaks is one and the same. Where the distinction arises is not in matters of essential character, but in attendant circumstances. The two Revelations are essentially the same, but they are not interchangeable, since each is adapted to its own circumstances, and gifted both by different means and for different functions. It is still God who speaks: the character of the Revelation has not changed. But the human situation is different, and the means and function have changed. These matters apart, we need to recognise clearly the oneness of the Revelation of God.

The first sphere in which a distinction becomes apparent is that of human circumstances. Natural Revelation is the knowledge of God gifted to man in the natural circumstances of created life: for this reason it may most aptly and correctly be described as the Word of Creation. It is the source of that natural, unquestioning knowledge of God pictured so wonderfully in the book of Genesis, where the Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the evening and conversed with creature man.¹ Natural Revelation refers us to that knowledge of God with which man, as created by God, was naturally endowed, a knowledge no less the gift of God on that account, but imparted in accordance with the Divine order of creation; something which man as man naturally experienced and enjoyed.

¹ Genesis iii. 8.

But this Revelation, as a part of the Divine creation, only avails for man in his natural circumstances. That does not mean, as the moderns are tempted to think, that a man in whom the emotional and intellectual qualities are fully developed may dispense with all other aids and know God by virtue of his attainments. Nor does it mean, as Rousseau so pitifully imagined,¹ that man in a state of nature, i.e. without the extraneous devices of civilisation, will enjoy communion with his creator as a normal experience of everyday life. The words natural and nature have come to acquire so many shades of meaning that when we speak of the natural circumstances of man the phrase may be interpreted to mean almost anything. The common use of the term human nature to describe the failings of man is an illustration of this confusion, and even in the Bible the term nature as applied to man is used in different senses. When, however, we speak of the natural circumstances of man in connection with Natural Revelation there can only be the one sense in which the phrase may rightly be used: that is, to connote the circumstances of human life as God in creation intended them to be. All else, whether it be the full civilisation of the modern or the ignorant savagery of Rousseau is human unnatural, the nature and capability of man at every turn thwarted and distorted by sin.

Natural Revelation is thus not the knowledge of God which man may naturally acquire, or even enjoy, without supernatural aids, that which the ordinary thinking and feeling man of the world knows of God. Quite the opposite. It is the knowledge of God enjoyed by man in his truly natural state, before his faculties were deranged and clouded by rebellion or sin. And this knowledge of God may no longer be enjoyed: Natural Revelation has of itself ceased to avail: the further special Revelation of Grace has become necessary; because man is now no longer a natural being in natural circumstances, but a rebellious creature living his life in the wholly unnatural circumstances attributable to human sin.

The false estimate of sin is no doubt the root cause of the modern confusion with regard to the knowledge of God, but a little reflection will show that two important points are clear and indisputable. First, it is clear that human life is in the deepest sense wholly unnatural, whether for the moment we

¹ Compare the *Discours sur l'Inégalité* and the *Confessions d'un Vicaire Savoyard*.

ascribe that unnaturalness plainly and bluntly to sin or whether we invent for it some other fancy explanation. To pretend that the recorded life of man is natural (except we use the term to describe the sinful nature of man, as in the Scriptures) is a sheer delusion, and this all competent theologians and even historians have always recognised. The history of man is a history of perpetual frustration. Man has been endowed with magnificent powers. Mentally, technically, spiritually, yes and even physically, he is indeed the lord and crown of creation.¹ But the history of man presents the most extraordinary spectacle of misapplication and abuse. Man as we know him is not a natural creature. He is a fallen sinner. The life which he lives is one which is wholly contrary to his true nature. Fully conscious of his high destiny, able by nature to mend and to rule a sin-shattered world, privileged indeed to live in harmony and in fellowship with the Creator, man is outstanding as the supreme example of dissipation and distortion. Even the very faculties by which he hopes to apprehend the Creator are clouded and blinded by sin. To speak of Natural Revelation in connection with fallen man is sheer hallucination.

III

A second point is clear: that if fallen man is to enjoy once again the knowledge of God, a further act of Revelation has become necessary. Man by nature was granted the privilege of knowledge, by means of the Natural Revelation, but in his sinful rebellion he has forfeited that knowledge, by a wilful refusal he has lost all cognisance of it. Scattered traces, it is true, remain, but mingled only with the crassest superstitions and denials, which owe their growth to the distorting effects of sin. The plight of man is such that Natural Revelation, although it has not been withdrawn—indeed as something which belongs to creation that would be impossible—although it still remains, a permanent witness and rebuke to the sinful ignorance of man, yet of itself it is now no longer of any avail. Where sin has entered in, it is not futile, but inoperative. If fallen man is to know God at all, then a further Word of God has become necessary, whether of judgment or of redemption. Special circumstances have now arisen, which may only be met by special measures. In the history of the dealings of God with man,

¹ Ps. viii. 5ff.

there is no question whatever at any point of an educative purpose, the progressive leading of man from the lower knowledge of Natural Revelation to the higher of the Revelation of Grace. No doubt the fall of man, in the wisdom of God, did come to have its place in what we recognise as a higher teleology. It led man to know the holy and loving Redeemer, who adopts us as sons, as well as the omnipotent Creator, who forms us creatures. Thus was the extremity of man transformed by wisdom and mercy into Divine opportunity. But this was not a course of instruction in which the first knowledge paved the way for the second, as the rudiments of the primary school prepare pupils for the advanced courses of high school and university. Rather, when man refused the all-sufficient knowledge of God granted at the first, and severed himself from God, neither acknowledging Him as Creator, nor honouring Him as Lord, then a second Revelation, different, and of a new sufficiency for sinners, a second Revelation of redeeming Grace and of Eternal Judgment was needed to replace the former, if the knowledge of God was to be restored at all. With the falsification of the nature of man, the natural knowledge of God has ceased altogether to be a natural possibility.

Natural Revelation is thus seen at the outset to be very strictly circumscribed in its application, and it is well to remember this fact when we proceed to a study of the means by which man was gifted by God with a knowledge of His Creator. There are those, of course, who, heedless of the plight of man in his sinful, fallen unnature, would insist that God is still to be known by natural means to-day, this primitive knowledge being the indispensable preliminary to a fuller knowledge in Jesus Christ. In maintaining this opinion they are usually at pains to seek out traces of an earlier revelation in the different religions of the pagan world, as compared with Judaism and Christianity. But once it is clearly grasped that man is no longer a natural being in the natural circumstances of created life, then it also becomes clear that despite the scattered traces of revelation which are indeed to be found, God is no longer known or knowable by natural means. This remains true even if, with some, we adopt the theory that amongst the heathen who have never heard the Gospel at all there are those who do know and worship the true God; since in their case, even though the Revelation of Grace has never been given, it is still only by the gift of

grace, not by natural operation, that the old channels of knowledge still avail.

How then is God naturally revealed? In what way may God be known in the natural circumstances of life? The Scriptures, which are, of course, primarily a record of the Revelation of Grace and Judgment, treat of this prior revelation only in an incidental manner, but from such passages as do exist, notably the first and second chapters of the Roman Epistle,¹ it is clear that God made use of two main channels of Revelation in the order of Creation. He gave to man, first, an outward witness: the world of nature was a visible demonstration of the Godhead, which man in his natural life could not but fail to recognise and to respect. He also gave to man an inward witness: from the very first the will of God was written in the heart of man, as something inherent in his nature as man, as a natural endowment of humanity; man was gifted with conscience.

First God gave to man an outward witness. Confronted with the spectacle of the world, with all its wealth and variety, with all its manifestations of a superior intelligence and a higher power, man could not fail to recognise his Creator in the thing created. For the invisible things of Him are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.² The world of nature was never intended by God to be a problem to man, upon which man in the pride of sin should exercise his distorted reason and pass his puny judgments. From the very first God was known in the creation and the voice of God heard in the operation of His Hands. But for sinful man that is no longer the case. Even where it is recognised, as perhaps by the majority of men, that behind the universe there must stand some Supreme Power, the nature of the world and of its Creator have become a philosophical problem of the first magnitude. Where God was once known through the Creation as a personal Lord and Creator, now there is a conflicting tangle of opinion, the jostling of Deism, Theism, Pantheism, Infinite, Absolute, Idee, Wille, Macht, Ding an Sich, Life Force, Atheism, Agnosticism, and all their permutations and combinations, in which the true nature of God remains always hidden and obscure. And this quite apart from the more blatant idolatry in which God is worshipped in the form of an inanimate object, or in which the

¹ Rom. i. 19 ff. and ii. 12 ff.

² Ibid.

world itself is elevated to the status and dignity of the Godhead.

Nowhere perhaps is the pernicious unnature of sinful man more apparent than at this point; nowhere does the perversion of Divine truth reveal itself more clearly. On every hand the boasting claim is heard, that in nature alone there is, even for sinful man, a sufficiency of Divine revelation. Whether it is the artist who revels in natural beauty or solitude; whether the scientist who stands amazed at the intricate mechanism of natural life; whether the ordinary man, who, without claim to art or science or philosophy, is aware of that something which must be beyond the twinkling star and the flaming sunset, incessantly the cry goes up that here, outside of Christ, God Himself, the true God, may be known and worshipped. We must not wonder at this cry, nor must we pass too strict a censure upon it. It is the home-cry of man for the Garden, man seeking to avail himself once again of that natural means of knowledge which God in creation ordained, but which man in his folly has wilfully obscured. It is the cry of man, who, aware of his high destiny, is cast forth into the wilderness which he himself but barely comprehends. With sympathy and with kindness the cry must be heard and understood, and yet tenderly but firmly the truth must be made known, that no longer does the path of knowledge lie this way, that the way to the Garden is still kept by the angel with the flaming sword,¹ that by the contradiction of his nature man is severed from God by an irrevocable decree. The God of nature is and must be still the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God. If it is here that the altar would be erected, its dedication must be still to the unknown God.²

It is not that the power and the glory of God are not even yet manifest in Nature, as they were at the first. Rather it is that sin has come down as a veil upon man, blinding his eyes for ever to the eternal realities. God is only the hidden God to sinful man, and, indeed, as the story of Eden teaches us, it is not God who hides, but man.³ God has not withdrawn the knowledge of Himself in nature, but man in sin has rendered himself incapable of perceiving it. The Revelation itself still remains, as is witnessed by the two facts, first, that even sinful man is gropingly aware of it, and second, that when once in

¹ Gen. iii. 24.

² Acts xvii. 23.

³ Gen. iii. 8.

Grace God has sought and found the lost, as one of the wonders of the Christian life the pages of Heaven once more are opened, and the Christian beholds in the works of Heaven and earth the handiwork of his Saviour Christ. "Without Him was not anything made that was made."¹ In Grace the riddle of Nature finds its true solution. The Heavens declare the glory of God.² God who appears as the Saviour is known again as the Creator. The Revelation of Nature is thus restored and fulfilled in the Revelation of Grace.

IV

Thus far, however, our study of the means of Natural Revelation has been confined to what is only the one aspect of it, the outward witness. But in the Word of God a further fact is clear, even if all the implications of it are still the occasion of much debate; the fact that together with the outward God has also gifted an inward witness, the testimony of conscience. When Natural Revelation is being considered, or the means by which man, as created, could know the Creator God discussed, not only have we to reckon with the outward proclaiming of God by works of Nature, but also with the knowledge of God written upon the heart of man, that which we have come to know as conscience. And if man as created by God could not but recognise the power and the glory of God in the works of creation, then in the voice of conscience, the knowledge of right and wrong, the awareness of the will of God, he could not fail to know the holiness and the righteousness of God.

Conscience, with Nature, has become for sinful man a problem of the first order, and here again we may measure to the full the extent to which the proud rebellion of man has distorted and veiled the Natural Revelation of God. The majority of men, it is true (or at any rate the majority in christianised and Bible-instructed lands), still think of conscience as the inward voice of God, but this recognition is no longer of any avail when it comes to the knowing of God in the life and heart. Indeed, it constitutes a question apart in the vast human problem of the knowledge of God, a question upon which thinkers and writers have exercised their ingenuity throughout the centuries. By conscience, even in the purest forms in which it may be seen amongst sinful humanity, the personal will of an all-

¹ John i. 3.² Ps. xix. 1.

righteous, all-loving Creator is now no longer understood (apart from Jesus Christ). Rather, by conscience man has been led to the postulating of a variety of theories, the Divine Reason, the Natural Law, the Categorical Imperative—hypotheses which, if not utterly valueless in themselves, are useless when it comes to the true knowledge of God. And finally, of course, there are those who launch the supreme attack, denying altogether the Divine origin of conscience, and attributing its working solely to natural forces, the power of custom, the urge of enlightened self-interest, the drive of evolution, and the like.

Conscience, except it is awakened and instructed by the Holy Spirit to work conviction of sin, can never lead a single soul to know the true God. Adam, that is to say man as created by God, did know God through conscience, but the moment he raised his own will, or the will of the Devil, against the revealed will of God, the moment he denied the Holiness and the Righteousness of God, that moment a gulf was fixed between God and Adam which the now wounded and stricken conscience could no longer bridge, and Adam fled from God. Ideally, it is true, God may still be known by conscience, that is to say where man consistently obeys the voice of conscience throughout his life. In Jesus the Man, the second Adam, the one whose meat it was to do the will of Him that sent Him,¹ the perfect knowledge of and communion with the Father was no doubt maintained by this Natural Revelation, if we regard the life of Jesus from the purely human point of view. But in reality, in a world where men are sinners, and conscience is persistently disregarded and deadened, then conscience alone, apart from Grace, is powerless to do the work for which it was fashioned.

It is interesting to note, however, that although conscience can no longer lead men to a knowledge of God by natural means, yet its role is of tremendous importance even yet in the revelation of God. Conscience, rendered inoperative by human sin, is not a useless instrument discarded by God. As it is the knowledge of the Will of God (even though blunted, refused and unrecognised), this is impossible. Rather, when God comes again to man making Himself known by the miracle of Grace, it is through conscience that He works, but through conscience now awakened and restored by the Holy Ghost. Not that God merely restores the old knowledge of Himself. That is impos-

¹ John iv. 34.

sible until the problem of sin is removed: indeed the awakened conscience drives man to recognise rather his far-ness from, and ignorance of God. But conscience is used by God for this quite other end, not of introducing to God, but of showing to man the helplessness and terror of his plight as a sinner condemned, and of driving him to the Saviour Jesus Christ, in whom alone a way of escape may be found. Once God has been found and known again by Revelation, then, of course, Conscience, with Nature, resumes its natural function, and the Christian man delights to listen to the will of his Father as revealed to him by the inward voice.

V

By our study we have thus come to see that Natural Revelation is the Revelation gifted to man in the natural circumstances of created life and operating outwardly through the witness of nature and inwardly through that of conscience. It now remains briefly to sum up the function of Natural Revelation, and here again it will be helpful to establish a contrast with the Revelation of Grace. Already, indeed, the main function of Natural Revelation will have become clear. It was gifted to man in order that the creature might enjoy a natural unbroken fellowship with his Creator, the one in whose image he was created. In this it may at once be compared and contrasted with the Revelation of Grace. By the one a natural communion was established: the life of man was from the outset brought into harmony with the Godhead. By the other that communion, shattered by human rebellion, was restored in Jesus Christ; but this time no longer on the basis of the natural, but on that of the spiritual, by miracle. In both cases the aim is the same, that the life of man should be lived in fellowship with that of his Creator. But whereas in the case of the old Revelation that relationship was established in the natural world of creation, now a miracle of Grace has taken place. The sinner, as far as his natural life is concerned, is under an irrevocable sentence of death and separation.¹ But God in Grace has stooped down to re-create, to give to man a new life of the spirit,² in which fellowship with Himself may once more be enjoyed, to speak in Jesus Christ a Word of Forgiveness which means release from the bondage of sin and adoption into the family of God.³ The harmony of Eden

¹ Gen. iii. 3; cf. Rom. vi. 23.

² John iii. 3f.

³ Gal. iv. 5.

has not been restored, not, that is to say, on the old terms. In this world even the Christian experiences a tension between the old, perishing nature of death and sin and the new nature of the spirit.¹ But now a higher fellowship has been created. Man has been exalted to a communion with God impossible even in Eden. As contrasted with the fellowship of creation, that communion is now enjoyed only by promise, but it awaits a consummation in eternity which even the Christian cannot contemplate, but which exceeds his utmost expectations. When, indeed, we pause to consider what a paradise of beauty and goodness this world of time and sense would afford were it not for the blighting, shattering touch of human sin, then it baffles us to imagine what it shall be hereafter when God creates all things new,² when nothing that defileth shall ever enter in,³ but when the redeemed servants, the adopted sons of God, shall be with Him for ever. Truly such good things as pass man's understanding are laid up for them that love Him.⁴

Natural Revelation was gifted in order that man might as a natural benefit of created life enjoy communion with his Maker. But together with and included in that communion there is also a responsibility on the part of man, which in modern theology is often glibly passed over, but which is an equally important function of Natural Revelation. If communion with God is to be enjoyed, then the Lordship of God must be acknowledged and His Will done. Whether we speak of God as Father or Creator, there is no escaping this fact. God is the Lord. It is the Will of God which supremely matters. It is the Will of God which is perfectly righteous. It is the Will of God which guarantees perfect happiness. Certainly we may not speak of man's enjoyment of communion with God as the end or function of Revelation without recognising the corresponding responsibility of man. Man was granted a natural knowledge of God, not only that he might have fellowship with God, but also that he might know the Will of God and do it: not, of course, in grudging necessity, not in the hope of gaining a reward, not as an automaton, but realising that to do the Will of God *is* fellowship with Him, realising that the success, the happiness, the ordering of the world depends upon the fulfilment of the purpose of God by His creatures, under the dominion of God's

¹ Rom. vii.

² Rev. xxi. 5.

³ Rev. xxi. 27.

⁴ Collect for 6th Sunday after Trinity.

appointed steward,¹ man. In any discussion of the function of Revelation, enjoyment in fellowship is inseparably linked with Purpose.

This again is equally clear in the Revelation of Grace. God stoops down to man in his necessity, God grants to him new life in the Saviour, not only that he might escape the tyranny of his own sinfulness, not only that the communion with Himself might be restored, but in order that man should give himself again to the fulfilment of the divine Will and Purpose.² Elected by Grace into the family of God, man recognises again that the Will of the Father is the perfect will of all, and its fulfilment the guarantee of continued joy and fellowship. In the new heaven and the new earth the Will of God will be done by all, as in the old creation the Will of God was done before the fall. But it is by Revelation that man perceives what is the Will of God, and knows what it is that he ought to do. Some, indeed, would go further and maintain that he is also given a desire to fulfil it. By the Revelation of Nature Adam not only experienced fellowship with God, but also he clearly knew and understood the Will of God, and, of course, traces of that knowledge and understanding still persist throughout the world to-day, as traces of the first knowledge of God are not wholly obliterated. By the Revelation of Grace not only is communion with God re-created, but the knowledge of, the insight into, the Will of God is restored and deepened. Henceforth we are not servants who know not their Master's will, but friends.³ In Jesus Christ the Revelation of the Will of God, begun under the Law and Prophecy, is brought to its full flower. Not only did Jesus Christ remove the stumbling block of sin which separated man from God: He did that at the Cross and in the Resurrection, when sin was borne and death conquered. But He also gave us the teaching which is the mainspring of Christian life⁴ and action. In Jesus Christ salvation was brought, and the Will of God for His redeemed fully made known. The function of Revelation, whether of Nature or of Grace, may be summed up as fellowship established, and the Will of God known and done, the enjoyment of man in the fulfilment of the Purpose of God.

In our study of Natural Revelation: what it is; the means by which it is gifted; the functions which it performs; it has

¹ Gen. i. 28.

² Cf. Eph. ii. 10.

³ John xv. 15.

⁴ The Sermon on the Mount, and other passages.

been our purpose to correct the false views of those who, whether intentionally or merely carelessly, would see in the Revelation of God a natural process, and also to establish clearly the points of contact and of contrast between the two Revelations to which the Scripture points. In the course of this study two points of real interest and importance have emerged. First, it is clear that Natural Revelation is no mere tentative groping, no inadequate preliminary, no exploratory beginning, as some, confusing it with the relics of Natural Revelation amongst sinful man, have foolishly imagined. Natural Revelation is the perfect Revelation of God to man as created, clearly set forth in conscience and in nature, and with the definite and specific purpose of establishing the Will of God in the world, and fellowship and order in the fulfilling of it. That Revelation itself did not fail. Rather when man listened to the Tempter, it was ignored, flouted, refused; only the traces of it being handed down imperfectly to succeeding generations to form a basis for the religion and the thought of sinful man. The Revelation itself was and is a perfect work, completely adapted to the needs of man as created. Of course, if we would be wiser than God, and imagine that Natural Revelation, in the form of the scattered relics of it, worked upon by human reason, was intended for and adapted to the needs of sinful men as a preliminary to the perfect Revelation in Jesus Christ, then we shall be disappointed, and speak with reason of rudimentary and imperfect lessons. But this is not the teaching of Paul in Romans. Paul merely points out that in view of the earlier Revelation the just judgment of God upon human sin cannot be escaped even on the plea of utter ignorance. This is a point upon which we need to be absolutely clear if in our theological thinking confusion and muddle are to be avoided. Natural Revelation was to man as created, and in order that he might know and serve the Creator, but that Revelation was and is flouted, distorted and set aside. Secondly, it has become clear that in the Revelation of Grace, the perfect work of God towards lost and guilty sinners, the unfolding of the Godhead as the Saviour, completed in the Crucified and the Risen Redeemer, in that Revelation the earlier Revelation is caught up, restored, and indeed enriched and deepened. All the knowledge revealed to Adam, and all the blessings of that knowledge, are the privilege of the new man in Christ, conferred equally with the new knowledge and the new blessings of redemption. At every

point the earlier Revelation is taken up, at every point the knowledge amplified, at every point the purpose deepened and the blessings augmented. Truly, faced with the spectacle of a creation ruined, we must exclaim at the wonder and wisdom and might of the Creator, for whom the ruin is but the basis of a nobler work. Nowhere has the work of God been in vain. The will of Devil and man may dash themselves against His operations for the moment, but that which He does may never finally be frustrated and brought to nought. The Revelation of Nature is refused and rendered inoperative by human sin. Then in the Revelation of Grace God restores it, fuller, deeper, richer, more full of grace and wonder, redeeming the sinner.

G. W. BROMILEY.

Haverigg-on-Sea.
England.