

THE INCARNATION OF THE ETERNAL WORD.

THE resurrection of our Lord has a bearing upon the problems of science and philosophy, the history of matter, and the history of mind, as well as upon the personal hopes of the individual soul. In other words it is a theological, as well as a religious truth; and intimately as the two are connected, they must still be kept apart in the mind. For the common tendency which there is to confuse them is responsible for many of the intellectual difficulties which now, as of old, are hindering the acceptance of the faith. Now, as of old, the religious missionary whose whole being is devoted to track moral evil to its hideous haunts, and there fight it in its grosser forms—to rescue and renew and guide the souls of sinners Godward—naturally tends to emphasize the undreamed, un hoped, uncalled-for, miraculous character of Christian grace; the strangeness of our salvation, so far beyond all we looked for. And so the Incarnation comes to be regarded as an isolated exception to the order of the world, a Divine afterthought, if we may say so reverently, consequent upon human sins.

But the age is scientific as well as practical, and science knows nothing of isolated exceptions. It is not possible that men whose bias is to view things from the intellectual side, should not be alienated from the Christian message, the Christian life, the Christian hope, by the popular travesties of Christian theology, to which the insulation of a few doctrines, for homiletic purposes, and the disproportionate insistence on them, has gradually given rise.

We cannot therefore, in the present day, recur too often

to, or dwell too strongly on, those portions of the teaching of St. Paul and of St. John which exhibit the Incarnation as the predestined, and in that sense as the natural summary and climax of the material creation,

“Cent’ring in Himself complete what truth
Is elsewhere scattered, partial, and afar.”

“By Him all things were made”—the atoms, which we call ultimate; the myriad modes and forms and fashions into which the atoms are transmuted and built up; heat and light and electricity; the world of colour and the world of sound; the courses of the stars, the strength of the mountains, the raiment of the lilies, the beauty and the wonder of bird and insect life, the uncouth animals, the mind of man—“and without Him was not anything made that was made.” So far all Theists are agreed. But mere Theism does not satisfy the mind. The closer we look into the material world, with its resistless, omnipresent, inextinguishable energies of life, the more we feel that we are in the presence chamber of a power that is Divine. Nature does not bear the stamp of a machine created by a far-off God, and then left to its own working. Theism, if it would not shrink up into Deism, must go forward into Pantheism; and yet, to be consistent with itself, it cannot. But the Christian creed continues, “In Him was life.” The Creator of the world has not deserted it. He sustains it. He indwells it. And the forces that have gathered suns and stars out of the formless mist, and shaped them for use and habitation, and peopled them with life, and supported and sustained that life through all its gradual development, “till at the last arose the man,” are part of the working hitherto of Him who is the life.

And that Life was the light of men. Above all other forms of energy towers the thought of man—slowly building up societies; evoking, as we say, a moral consciousness; re-

fining age by age upon the moral ideals of its past; issuing, as leisure increases, in art, philosophy, and science; culminating in the pangs of martyrs and the ecstasy of saints. And through all this process we believe that that Life has been the light of men. The inventor has been explaining his own machinery, the artist exhibiting his own pictures, the author re-reading his own book; the Creator leading men, by slow degrees, to learn the meaning of His own creation, by teaching them first to discover and then to co-operate with its laws. "He left not Himself without witness," says St. Paul. Socrates and Plato, not less than Moses and Isaiah, dimly descried personalities beyond the horizon of authentic history, such as were the Buddha, Confucius, Zarathustra, and all the unknown, unhonoured pioneers of early thought, among those through whom "at sundry times, in divers manners, God spake in times past unto the fathers;" and all the legitimate developments of art, all the verified discoveries of science, all the yearnings of our race for larger liberty or lovelier life, are manifestations of the Life that was the light of men—ways in which for ever He is coming to His own.

Finally, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The thought is presented by St. John as a climax. Matter in its successive gradations, from the conflict of atoms to the body of the saint, had been expressing with increasing clearness the character and attributes of its Creator. Reason had been yearning to reduce its material embodiment from stubborn resistance to obedient freedom, and at length in the fulness of time the two currents coalesce. Matter becomes at last an adequate expression of its Creator. God is at last revealed to His creation in material form. And the Incarnation, once accomplished, throws a "supplementary reflux of light" upon all the ascending stages of the world's antecedent evolution.

For the fact of the Resurrection as attested, preached,

appealed to, by St. Paul, is too plain an event of history to be possibly ignored, and the Resurrection, once accepted, proves the Incarnation to have been a reality; independently of the undoubted truth that our more sympathetic modern criticism tends increasingly towards the conviction, that no combination of, or refinement upon, the thoughts of antecedent thinkers could have invented the Incarnation if it had not actually happened. Here, as in all other cases, philosophy is the interpreter of history; it never has been, it never can be, its creator. But if we thus view the Incarnation as no interruption of previous development, but as the climax, the summary, the fulfilment of all nature's dim auguries, of all philosophic aspirations, of all that prophet and king had desired to see, and had not seen; predestined, we may well believe with the Franciscan theologians, independently of human sin; secular thought and the secular world, as it is called, assume for us a new significance. Our Lord did not cease to appeal to the teaching of the lilies, and the corn, and the sunrise, as if its need were superseded by His being the very truth. He only reveals it to be more nearly one with Him than men had before suspected, by such phrases as "I am the Vine," "I am the Shepherd," "I am the Bread of Life." He does not abrogate the Roman law, but only points to its emanation from above. He says expressly of the drift of previous Hebrew history, "Think not that I am come to destroy, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

So that on whatever side of us we look, we see in Christianity not so much a circumference within which is truth, and outside which falsehood, as a centre of attraction towards which all that is lovely and of good report is for ever drawing nearer, till approximation becomes prophecy. Thus the face of external nature, with its loveliness of form and colour, and all its endless harmony of action and repose, speaks to us, not only of an artist who designed it, but also

of an indwelling Spirit which sustains and animates its every part, and is revealed with increasing clearness as we ascend in the scale of creation, from the mystery of the mountains, to the life of the trees that clothe them, and the motions of the beasts that haunt them, and the senses, the hearts, the brains of the men that look upon them and love them; as sculptured expression is surpassed by painting, and painting again by music, and music when it can rise no higher, bursts as in Beethoven's great last symphony, articulate into song. And we cannot but feel in the presence of such a fact as this, that all the forms of nature-worship which we find among savage races, much more the refined Pantheism of later days, point to a truth which professing Christians are often apt to underrate. They cannot be summarised and set aside as the merely fanciful creations of a superstitious or poetic temperament. They are only the inadequate expressions of a legitimate human instinct whose natural satisfaction is the doctrine of the "Word made flesh." Our judgment of the modern Pantheist will vary with the nature of the causes which withhold him from his allegiance to the faith "as it is in Christ." But we must remember that there is an element of Divine truth which we believe in common, and an element which we are unfaithful to our Master's teaching if we overlook. Or again, if we look below the surface, from nature's aspect to her operations, we see more there than the contrivance of a mighty machinist. For the great machinery lives, throbs, pulses with an energy which is ever at work controlling, transforming, quickening the stubborn atoms into versatile, obedient ministers to the free activity of man. Can we wonder if the miracle of matter hides all else from its too eager student, and he stops short in some form or other of materialistic creed. We may pity him, with humility, for all the hope he loses; but before we blame him, we who have not blanched our

cheeks or bleared our eyes in the dark mine, we must ask ourselves severely what use we have made of his life's labours. The more we learn of the importunate reality of matter and of its intimate connexion with the things we are accustomed to call spiritual, the more necessity we see for the Incarnation, if religion is ever to be adequate to human life in its entirety; and the more reasonableness in its sacramental application to our souls. This much at least the materialist ought to have taught us about God's world, and he can only have taught it by patient obedience to God's law of learning. We are bound to accept his teaching with thankfulness as seeing in it more than he ever dreamed of, but with trembling for the account of it we must one day give as representing the life of our brother laid down for our enlightenment. Physical science for the Christian means nothing less than a fresh flood of light. It is at our peril that we complacently treat it as if it were only one more foe.

So, too, with the civilization by which we are surrounded. It does not follow because we deny that Christianity could ever have been evolved out of the mere action of those complex forces which go to make up what we call secular civilization, that it is not largely indebted to those forces in every age, as beyond question was the case when it first began to overspread the world. We are familiar with the thought that the Roman roads, and the Roman law, and the universal language were part of a providential, "*præparatio evangelica*;" but many to whom this is a commonplace, shrink from the more important fact that the ideas which paved the way for, and the phrases which embodied the very cardinal truths of, our theology in early ages, were prepared in the schools of Athens for the work they were afterwards to do. But for that theology, which men have not scrupled to represent as a paganized corruption of the simplicity of the Gospel, the Gospel would never have been

preserved in its primitive integrity to after ages. For that theology was nothing more than the intellectual insistence upon the reality of the fact that "the Word was made flesh." And its authors were sustained and emboldened in their work by the conviction that it was the point to which the same eternal Word had in all philosophy and prophecy been guiding the minds of men.

But if the eternal Word was working in the thinkers of the early world, He cannot be less present among secular movements now. We often hear men speak as if with the advent of Christianity, the Spirit of God had retired from the extra-Christian world. But the very thought is a contradiction in terms. True, it is impossible in a complex age like ours to disentangle the different forces that are at work within society; and many a movement that seems extra-Christian, may have come from a Christian source; but even if this were not so, the principle would still remain that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh from above. The increase of political liberty, with all the opportunities for development and discipline of character, which self-government involves, the humaneness of modern law, the spread of sanitary science, with its consequent moral blessings, the mitigations of war, and increasing amity of nations, the extension of intellectual culture and the recognition of its value, all are due, through whatever agency they seem to come about, "to the Light that lighteth every man coming into the world."

This view of the Incarnation as the climax to which all life and thought lead up, has naturally found its most emphatic expression in intellectual ages, and at the Ephesus or Alexandria, the intellectual centres of their age. At times when thought was not, and the vital energies of the Christian Church were concentrated in a death struggle with the moral evil of the world, her speculative mission would lie in comparative abeyance. But never perhaps before has

it more needed reassertion, than in an age which looks at all things in the light of their evolution.

Our Lord Jesus Christ stands forth as the head and summary of that material creation, through whose gradual development He had all along been preparing for Himself a body—man made at last in the image of God. He stands forth as the final utterance of those eternal verities which philosophy had all along been struggling to express with stammering tongue and lisping lips—the Word made flesh. He stands as the goal in which all human progress finds its possibility, its meaning and its end—the way, the truth and the life. He is immanent, as we say, in all creation ; but none the less He is its creator, and as such not only through all, but above all, God for ever. As long as we hold this truth firmly we cannot over-estimate the reality of His partial presence in materialism, in Pantheism, in secular civilization, and in all the various imperfect forms of moral conduct and religious creed. And it is our duty as Christians never to under-estimate that presence, not only because no part of God's revelation of Himself to men can, in the long run, be ever neglected with impunity ; but also because it is only by these less direct methods of approach that many souls are capable of being led to Him at all. While on the other hand we may never rest content, till we have done all we can to lead men forward from the lesser to the larger light, from the vision through a glass darkly, to the vision face to face.

For what our Incarnate Lord is to the universe considered as a whole, and to humanity in the mass, He is also to the individual persons of which humanity consists. And the special mission of the Christian, as distinct from all other teachers, is to bring men one by one into personal relation with their Lord. For "personality" is the highest mode of existence known to our experience. The material of our bodies, and the thoughts of our minds, drift

through us like a stream, and are gone we know not where ; but the personality, the I, within us, remains from the cradle to the grave, self-identical, self-conscious, independent, irresponsible, alone ; the one supreme reality of which we are completely certain, and of which any solution of the universe, that is to satisfy, must take account. It is nothing to us to know that God dwells in matter, and moves in thought, and moulds the varying purposes of men to his own ends, unless He is in some relation to these "personalities" of ours, with their importunate claim to be ends in themselves, not instruments used and thrown aside. But persons can only really be united to a person, as we see in our daily life. It is not in the amusements, or the business, or even in the duties, which occupy our bodies, or brains, or wills, that we really live ; but in the contact which they involve, and the response that they call out from our fellows, our friends and dear ones, persons, like ourselves.

Hence the solitary significance of the Incarnation. On the one side it was a revelation, fuller only in degree, of the God who had been working hitherto in the material, the intellectual, the moral world. But on the other it was a revelation, different in kind, that God was not merely an impersonal "drift of tendency," nor supra-personal, in such sense as to obliterate His personality, but a Person, and as such, One in community with whom all human persons were destined to find the satisfaction of their complex being. This it is which differentiates Christianity from other creeds. It is not only obedience to a law, or even following an example, but union with a Person.

Now the point in which persons touch is the will. We may think like others, or act like others, without being really one with them. We are only one with them, when we will what they will, and because they will it. And

so the end and object of the Christian's will is to be conformed to the will of Christ. In the early stages of our life-long development, that will of Christ may only appear to us as an inexorable moral law, convincing us of sin; but as we struggle on, the commands of the law melt into the accents of a voice within us, more and more articulate, the more they are obeyed; and duties are done easily, and sanctions become needless, for it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure. And therefore Christian holiness is no less attainable than the more limited aims of conduct which we are so often advised to pursue; because we believe that the Holy Spirit dwells within us, to quicken us into living manifestations of Himself.

And from this follows our much-controverted Christian doctrine, that the intellectual is dependent upon the moral and spiritual life. Particular branches of knowledge may be successfully acquired, apart from the general character of the individual man who pursues them. But if the complete illumination of the intellect is only to be found in union with Him who is at once its Author, its object and its light—and personal holiness is the necessary condition of that union—it follows that only he who “doeth the will shall know of the doctrine,” despite of the familiar fact that many a distinguished thinker is actively anti-Christian either in conduct or in creed, while many a sincere Christian lives and dies in intellectual ignorance. For what is the secret of scientific success? Humility, the man of science will be the first to tell you, in receiving the revelation of nature's laws; obedience to those laws as one by one they are revealed to him; patience in the face of failure; perseverance to the end. But all these are moral qualities of God's ordaining, and precisely as he observes them the man of science will become to us a discoverer and teacher of the truth of God, and worthy of all the reverence which

God's instruments deserve. It is only when such an one stops short of, or denies, what we as Christians must believe to be the legitimate end and issue of his message, that we follow him no longer. He has taught us much which we lesser men should never have learned without him, and it is not for us to pry into the hidden causes of his further failure. Our Master's call is plain to us. What is that to thee? Follow thou Me. But diffident as we are, and ought to be, in maintaining our position against intellectual superiors, when we think what moral effort that superiority has cost; it is far otherwise when we face the misbelief of the average world. For one man, such as has been described, there are ten thousand misbelievers, who are what they are simply because they "do not the will." Pride, sloth, self-seeking, above all, sins of the flesh, in whatever shape or form, blind the eye, dull the ear, deaden the understanding to the things of God. And when men plead intellectual uncertainty, in defence of immoral life, they will find if they only look within, that they are mistaking effect for cause, and the source of all their malady is an evil *heart* of unbelief. Sin keeps them far away from the Person of Jesus Christ, and therefore from the Truth which is His thought embodied in the world. On the other hand the Christian, however ignorant he may seem of things external, is only beginning the process of his knowledge at the other end; from centre to circumference, instead of circumference to centre. He feels his personal nearness to the mind of Christ, and studies first to learn the dealings of that mind with his own soul. For there he sees the meaning of the bright ideals of his early life, and of all the joys and sorrows that have chequered his career, the bereavements, the frustrate purposes, the slow detachment from the world; the strangely occurrent whispers of consolation and of warning, the deepening insight, the increasing peace; till he can read through his whole history the special provi-

dence of One who loves him, and whose character and ways of working are revealed in that love. There is an indifference to earthly knowledge which only comes of indolence; but there is an indifference which belongs to those who have chosen the part of Mary, and cannot for a moment be away from Him they love. So the great politician, or philosopher, or poet, is known to the outer world by the work that he has done; but his child, his wife, his friend, who know the human heart within him, are content in that great knowledge to leave all else alone. It is this interior knowledge of the mind of Christ that the Christian, in proportion to his progress, feels himself to possess; and once possessed, it must thereafter give a new bias to his life. He will sympathize intensely with all the secular schemes and systems which in any way throw light on life and further the well-being of his fellow-men. But his own mission is to bear witness, at whatever risk of misconstruction, to the existence of the more excellent way. He welcomes the signs of progress in the dark places of the earth; but progress is slow, and time is short, and souls are dying every day; and "the one thing needful" is to bring them to the knowledge of the love of God, declared to us by Christ His Son.

But there remains yet another constituent of our human personality, beside our reason and our will—the body that is the instrument of all our thought and action, the wondrous garment interwoven with the very fibres of our soul, the messenger for good and evil between us and the world that is without. The more we learn in these modern days of the mystery of matter, of the ethereal subtlety of its elemental structure and its infinite capacity for spiritual expression, the more instinctively we feel that it is not destined to be done away. It is too wonderful, too beautiful, too real to have been created but for waste, by One who bids us gather up fragments that nothing may be lost.

And what are these bodies of ours, but the very flower of the material creation, adequate to every impulse of their animating soul. Is there no greater fate for them than meets the eye? So far nature leads us; but if we look then to the Word made flesh, we feel that our natural instinct is more than justified—for we see there a human body become the dwelling-place of God, and exhibiting, as a matter of history, in the few glimpses of its risen life, those infinite new capacities of our dim prophetic dreams. And the wisdom of the early Church becomes apparent in the grim tenacity with which, when philosophy meant idealism, and the secrets of matter were all unexplored, she clung to the reality of the human nature of her Lord. For only through the reality of that human nature can this last element of our personality, the body, rise to communion with the Eternal Word. There is a solidarity in the world of matter, linking its particles each to all; and individual things in their seeming distinctness are, when viewed from the material side, only the ripples of an ocean upon which they rise and fall. Each partial movement thrills the whole of it, and to touch it in a point is to touch it all. To this fact we owe much of the dark moral taint that we inherit from the days of old; but all the efficacy of its Christian antidote. For the leaven of the Incarnation leavened the whole lump. And in taking flesh upon Him, and transfiguring it by dying, the Word came into new contact, not only with the few in Palestine, whom He breathed upon, and sighed over, and healed by the trailing of His garment and the imposition of His hand; but with the human body everywhere, and its modes of material affection—sanctifying water to the mystical washing away of sin, consecrating bread and wine to holier purposes of sustenance, hallowing symbolic and ceremonial teaching, deepening the parables of nature and the significance of art. Yes; by His Incarnation, we are all brought nearer

to Himself—but contact is not communion. Many may touch and yet few be healed. Of bodily as of mental union with Him, the gateway is the will. For the will and not the body is the source and seat of sin. If the will is unholy, our nearness cannot but increase our alienation, as discord in a family is worse than with foreign foes. But if the will is holy, light and life and love flow into us through a thousand sacramental avenues from the risen body of our Lord.

By every channel, therefore, through which our personality radiates, we are called into communion with the Person of the Word made flesh—and the climax and completion of that communion is love. For love is not a function of part of our being, but of the whole. All other relations between men are in a measure abstract—they are concerned, that is, with their actions, or their thoughts, or their utility, as partners, colleagues, fellow-workers, employers, masters, slaves—with reference to some object that lies outside themselves. But if we love men it is for their own sake—because they are what they are. For love, and love alone, rests in its object as an end.

In appealing to our love, therefore, God appeals to our whole personality: and in revealing Himself as Love, He reveals His presence, along the ages, in all the yearnings of the human heart; to guide men to the one home in which alone they could find rest.

“To comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” is the privilege only of personal religion,—a vision to elect souls in pilgrimage among desert places of the unitive way. The humbler province of our theology is to tell those who have not seen it, that for them, too, the vision waits.

In the deepest, in the fullest sense, seeing only is believing; but in an age like ours, of keen inquiry, we may

lead many to come and see, by showing them that Christianity includes and finds a place for the affirmative assertions of all the other creeds; while by rejecting their negations, their exclusion that is, of it and of each other, it is more comprehensive, as a theory of the world, and therefore presumably more true. And in doing this we are not acting in any spirit of extorted concession; but reasserting the primitive doctrine, that the Eternal Word who created all things has been present from the beginning in the material world; in the course of philosophic thought; in the secular progress of mankind; in the wills, in the minds, in the bodies, in the whole persons of His saints; revealing more fully, in each new stage of universal evolution, "the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God—Who created all things by Christ Jesus, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

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LIGHTFOOT ON THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES.

II. GENUINENESS AND DATE OF THE EPISTLES.

2. HERESY. In his seventh proposition, Lightfoot maintained that the types of false doctrine which Ignatius combated, afford an evidence of the genuineness of the Epistles. In vol. i. pp. 359-368, he has carefully examined the statements in the Epistles regarding heresy,¹ and has reached the conclusion, that Ignatius has considered only one class of heretics, namely, *Judaistic Docketists*. Since now such heretics have been combated also in the Epistle

¹ See also pp. 368-375.