

dream here, and that is the thought suggested even by the crowing of a cock. Yet Joseph's answer to the question as to God's design in saving poor man, is happy,—'The glorifying of his name, of his grace and justice, etc., and the everlasting happiness of his creature.' That is like the answer to the first question of the Shorter Catechism, whose sunny belief in joy so fascinated the bright heart of Robert Louis Stevenson.

But the most striking theology of all is in the short description of the bath in the open air of the Garden. It is not, indeed, artistically equal to Bunyan's finest work, for this is a case in which the spiritual meaning breaks through the outward form of the allegory at considerable risk of grotesqueness. But, as an analysis of sanctification, the passage is memorable. The bath is in the open air—in contrast to all occult and secret initiations. Again, it strengthens their limbs, with that tenfold strength of the pure which at once recalls Galahad. The seal on the brow (contrary, it must be confessed, to all probabilities) beautifies them—just as their countenances, radiant with the new look of the holy, attracted the wonder and admiration of

the world to the Early Christians.¹ Finally, the test of holiness is that one sees not one's own white garments, but those of others.

The moral teaching of the passage is abundant and various, but its great lesson is the need for strenuousness, and the dangers which beset those who choose a slack or easy life. There is deep and far-reaching significance in the catalogue of the victims of Simple, Sloth, and Presumption—Slow-pace, Short-wind, No-heart, Linger-after-lust, Sleepy-head, and that immortal inspiration, 'a young woman, her name was Dull.' Nothing could be better than that, as an account of the kind of people who are tempted to fail in strenuousness. Their views of God and man, and of every detail of the nobler life, grow morbid and distorted, and they fail of all high destiny because, like the avoiders of the Hill Difficulty, 'they are idle; they refuse to take pains.' It is a picture of all that lamentable company of weak brethren who might have so easily been strong, but for the temptation that lured them into luxurious self-indulgence.

¹ Cf. the memorable words in which Pater describes 'Divine Service' in his *Marius the Epicurean*, chapter xi.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE PSALMS.

PSALM CXXXIX. 7.

'Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?'

THE 139th Psalm is doubtless, like several of those near it, one of those written during the Captivity. It was then probably that for the first time the Jews learned fully the sense of God's omnipresence here expressed. That captivity produced many remarkable effects upon them: it modified their spoken language; it exterminated their taste for idolatry, and common sorrow deepened their patriotic feelings; above all, it brought into greater clearness some doctrinal ideas, such as the immortality of the soul, the influence of angels, and eminently the omnipresence of God. It was when the Jews were taken out of their own land, and were separated from the national temple, that they first really felt that God

could be worshipped elsewhere than at Jerusalem—in synagogue as well as in temple, in the closet as well as in the sanctuary; that His ear was open to the mutterings of prayer from the exiles in a strange land; that travel where they might they were still present to Him, and He present to them. It was then that for the first time they felt God's exceeding nearness in every spot, and yet realized His vastness: 'If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.'

Agas have passed away, and the progress of time has afforded us abounding proofs of the Almighty's greatness which were not revealed to this pious Psalmist; but no nobler words have ever been used to express the vivid conception of God's omnipresence. Geography opening up the undiscovered parts of the globe and presenting

to us God's vastness stamped in the breadth of the steppe or the majesty of the mountain slope; or Imagination travelling from star to star till calculation seems unable to accompany it as it unwittingly hardly halts at the frontier of the visible creation; or History mapping out the stream of time, and testifying as it traces it backward to its unknown source and to the Voice, 'Before Abraham was, I am'; or Reason exposing link above link in the chain of causation, till it passes to a power which is certainly not mechanical and expires in faith—each of these has impressed us with the idea of God's omnipresence in a way not known to Hebrews of old. Yet though they may deepen our knowledge, they cannot elevate our piety beyond that of the Psalmist, or bring home to us more intensely the practical feeling of God's great nearness.

The most pathetic pages in the *Life of Andrew Fuller* relate to the great man's prodigal son, Robert. To the unspeakable grief of his father, Robert ran away to sea, and died off Lisbon in 1809. In a sermon preached on the Lord's Day after the receipt of the news, his father seemed to take great comfort from the fact that the gospel answers to the promised mercy in Dt 4²⁹: 'If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him.' 'Some,' he said, 'are far from home, and have no friend in their dying moments to speak a word of comfort, but He is near. When Jonah was compassed about by the floods, when the billows and the waves passed over him, he prayed to the Lord, and the Lord heard him.' Here Mr. Fuller gave vent to his feelings, and many who knew the cause wept with him. Later and fuller intelligence proved that the father was speaking almost prophetically, for during his last days Robert was known to all his shipmates as a sincere and devout Christian man.

The subject of the text is God's omnipresence. We may consider it (1) in reference to Nature, and (2) in reference to Man.

I.

The Omnipresence of God in Nature.

The thought to which the Psalmist gives expression in these magnificent words has become a commonplace of modern theology. 'Where is God?' asks the child, and we answer, half automatically, 'God is everywhere.' In the development of the Jewish religion this conception of God's omnipresence, reached only at a comparatively late period, was for long crossed and obscured by other simpler and more childish notions. To the moral attributes of Deity, to His supreme

pity and justice, there are endless references in the Psalter and the Prophets; to the Divine omnipresence there are but few. And, indeed, there is an element of philosophy and of mysticism in this conception, to neither of which the native Hebrew mind was pre-eminently prone.

It has been left to our nineteenth century, which had listened to Coleridge and Wordsworth, to enter deeply into the idea of the Psalmist, 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?' If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand guide me.' The very discoveries of science that were supposed to be going to annihilate divinity have only served to make us more conscious of God's presence. Men who endeavoured in former times, as St. Augustine did, to conceive of God, 'Life of their life as vast through infinite space,' find Him now as revealed in the infinitesimal space also, omnipresent, with His spirit and power in the immeasurably little, as well as the infinitely vast. The evolutionist more than most seems to have served the world in this direction; and all the correlations of forces, and the study of history, the comparison of thoughts and ideas of man and his surroundings, the linking on of present to the past in all departments of knowledge, instead of banishing God from us, seems more and more to set Him in our midst, and make us feel that God's hand has led the nation, and that His right hand has upheld the progress of the world.

1. Now, first of all, those of us who desire to fashion such an idea of God as may not be hindered or harmed by that small modicum of science which we are now unable to avoid, even if we wished, will find in this doctrine of God's universality much comfort and support. It has become increasingly difficult for any grown man or woman to think of God as an almighty Monarch, ruling the world as from without. We are aware that this, the child's conception of Him, does violence both to His spirituality and to His infinitude. If He is without the world, He is bounded by the world, and is limited by space; if, again, He is so limited, He is not a spirit, for a spirit transcends the limitation of space. God is the boundless Here, as He is also the everlasting Now.

2. Again, God's omnipresence may give us the key to that puzzle concerning His relation to the so-called laws of Nature, which has sorely exercised many simple but truly pious minds. Science tells us that these laws are changeless and inflexible: the rain and the drought of to-day depend upon the drought or rain of a million yesterdays, and both condition the physical character of to-morrow. But a simple trust in God's omnipotence as constantly rebels against these assertions: religion and science seem opposed. Now, if we would but more habitually remember that the laws of nature, whether of the rain or wind or human health and disease, are God's laws, that they are in no profane or unreal sense part of Himself, the expression of His will and of His being, we should at once see that they are obviously changeless and eternal even as He. To ask God to change them means to ask God to change Himself, to make the rational irrational, the immutable reality a varying and deceptive chimera.

3. It is the conception of God's immanence, of His Spirit as operative in nature as well as in man, which has constituted the meaning and worth of nature, as the living raiment of Deity, to many a philosopher and poet. It is this conception which, for example, underlies that famous passage in Wordsworth, where he says:

I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A notion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things.

4. The relation of God to the external world is not only made more intelligible upon this hypothesis, but nature herself, so regarded, assumes an aspect more beautiful and more divine. This is what Goethe felt in the oft-quoted lines:

Were *He* a God who working from without,
His hand extended, turns the world about?
No! from within must He that world control,
Nature in Him, Himself all nature's soul,
So that what in Him moves and breathes and
lives,
May never lack the power His spirit gives.

Has it not happened to us, over and over again, to say, 'Spring, or summer, was never so beautiful before'? This is true every year to the recipient soul. Not that there is any added physical charm or visible glory; but it is the Spirit of our Father that glows and beams upon us, that pours itself into our souls; and if we have grown by His nurture, there is in us more and more of spiritual life that can be irradiated, gladdened, lifted in praise and love, with every recurring phase of the outward world.¹

Dr. Pope in his Tamil Grammar tells a story of the Tamil poetess Auveiyar.

'The traditions current among the Tamil people regarding "the wonderful old woman" are very numerous. She was one day sitting in the porch of a temple with her feet stretched out straight before her—not considered to be a very respectful position in the presence of a superior. The officiating priest rushed out to her with the question, "Are you not ashamed to stretch out your feet in the presence of the Swami?" To which she replied, "Very true, sir! if you will show me where the Swami (Lord) is not, I will go and stretch out my feet there."²

II.

The Presence in Man.

God is nearer to us than in the world around us. 'In him we live, and move, and have our being.' When I reflect on the mysteries of my own being, on the complex organism, not one of whose numberless members or processes can be deranged without suffering or peril; when I consider my own confessed powerlessness as to the greater part of this earthly tabernacle in which I dwell, and the narrow limits of my seeming power as to the part of it which I can control; when I see the gates and pitfalls of death by and over which I am daily led in safety; when I resign all charge of myself every night, and no earthly watch is kept over my unconscious repose,—I know that omnipotence alone can be my keeper, that the unslumbering Shepherd guides my waking and guards my sleeping hours, that His life feeds mine, courses in my veins, renews my wasting strength, rolls back the death-shadows as day by day they gather over me. Equally, in the exercise of thought and emotion, must I own His presence and providence. He helps me to think. He makes me feel. He energizes my will. He holds open for me the record of memory. He kindles my hope. My soul lives only as it is bathed in the ocean of His life. Be it mine, then, so to live, that it shall be my joy to find in the whole realm of things that

¹ A. P. Peabody.

² Pope, *Tamil Handbook*, 176.

are or shall be no answer to the question, 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit?'

1. The religious aspiration of man seems to express itself in the desire to draw, as we say, nearer to God. Or, again, it is expressed by the desire to become, as we say, like God. What is the link of connexion between man and God? How does man draw near to Him? If God were far off locally, if He ruled the world from without, it would indeed seem as if there could be no bridge built between the creature and his God. But when God is conceived as omnipresent and immaterial Spirit, the infinite and yet self-conscious Spirit of Reason and Love, there seems to be at once a possible connexion between Him and any other self-conscious nature which is, in however feeble a degree, both rational and good. The more wisdom and goodness you have, the more you know of God, whether you profess belief in Him or not. And, above all, Love is known of love, and the secret of God, so far as man may learn it, is with those who love Him.

To the soul of man, bathed in this omnipresence, receiving all thought and knowledge through its mediation; living, moving, and having its being in it, what can be more easily conceivable than that there should also be conveyed to it thoughts, impressions, intimations, that flow directly from the Father of our spirits? There is much in our experience in nature that seems so spiritlike as to take away all antecedent improbability as to this influence. The telegraphic wire but avails itself of currents of force that sweep over land and sea, and it is they, not our mechanism, that really connect distant countries, that write here the message which has, it may be, outsped time, and is received hours before it started on the other side of the Atlantic. It is these currents, not the wires, brought into relation with the telephone, that waft the song or symphony from city to city. Before these wires were stretched, who knows in how many instances—some, at least, have left authentic record—sensitive brains and recipient souls have been moved from afar, and brought into momentary connexion with those on whom, perhaps, the bodily eye would never rest again? How know we that it is only between man and man that these currents pass? Comes not on them the voice of God to the soul? Bear they not His monitions of duty, His warnings against evil, His thoughts of peace?

Who of us is there that has not had thoughts borne in upon him which he could not trace to any association or influence on his own plane, seedling thoughts, perhaps, which have yielded harvest for the angel reapers, strength equal to the day in the conflict with temptation, comfort in sorrow, visions of heaven lifted for the moment above the horizon like a mirage in the desert? These experiences have been multiplied in proportion to our receptivity. As the message on the wires is lost if there be none to watch or listen at the terminus, so at the terminus of the spirit-wire there must be the listening soul, the inward voice, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'¹

2. But then if God is everywhere, is He *equally* near to all? If, in the physical world, we were bound to admit that God was in the raging storm as well as in the fertilizing sunshine, must we, in the moral world, say that He is equally near to the sinner and to the saint? We may observe that in the moral world, far less than in the physical world, do conceptions of space and time apply to God. He whose life exhibits less goodness has less of God than he whose life exhibits more. But nevertheless we do assert that the presence of reason is never, and can never be, wholly divorced from the presence of goodness, and that, therefore, in every rational being there is, just because God is omnipresent, the potentiality of a higher life.

But yet though we conceive that in one sense God is near to us in our frailty and sin, because love is compassionate and wise, and desires the salvation of all, and because, too, we have the power through God's Holy Spirit to repent and to return, nevertheless we are aware that the wilful obscuration of reason, which is sin, makes us far from God, though He (strange antinomy!) be not far from us. As the most essential attribute of God is goodness, so is moral evil that which prevents us from realizing the Omnipresent God. Hence this doctrine of omnipresence serves to magnify and accentuate the unnaturalness and horror of sin. To him who could fully realize the fact that he was living in God's presence, it would be almost impossible to do anything which would sully the clearness of that perception, or would loosen the bond which consciously unites him to God. 'Make us realize Thy presence' is therefore the most fundamental of human prayers; and though the Divine omnipresence remains in one sense a constant factor, we shall never cease to echo the aspiring cry of the Psalmist: 'Cast me

¹A. P. Peabody.

not away from thy presence, take not thy Holy Spirit from me.'

In telling the story of how he was led to believe in Christ, the late Dhanjebhai Nauroji laid much stress on a conversation he once had with a fellow-Parsee, a woman who had fallen low in sin. Dhanjebhai, then a lad of about fifteen, was going one morning to the mission school, when he found this woman sitting by the roadside, weeping bitterly. He stopped to ask what was the matter, never having seen any one in so great distress. 'I have been such a wicked woman,' she sobbed, 'and I am so afraid of God. He will find me, and punish me.' 'I will tell you what to do,' said the boy. 'In our courtyard there is a deep well. Fling yourself in there, and God will never see you.' 'That would not hide me from His sight,' she replied. 'Well,' he continued, 'go out in a boat into the bay, tie a large stone round your neck, and throw yourself into the deep sea. There God will never find you.' 'He would find me even in the depths of the sea,' she said, and continued to weep and lament. The boy, terrified at seeing such despair, fled away to the school, haunted by the thought of the all-seeing eye. The Bible lesson that day, dwelling specially on the words, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' went home to his heart and conscience, and before long he professed his faith in Christ, and learned to rejoice in the thought of an ever-present God.

3. God is everywhere: there is therefore no violent separation to be made between the natural and the spiritual. It is *in* the so-called natural that the spiritual must be revealed. So it is not only one day in seven which should or need be dedicated to God, but all days; not one place only, which may be sanctified by His presence, but every place. Not merely in the synagogue, or the church, but in the home, and the school, and the Parliament, yes, and in the workshop, the manufactory, and the mart, is that abiding presence, which can be realized by that which is akin to it, realized by reason, and realized by goodness, but realized only because it is *there*. For if God were not with us everywhere, we could be neither rational nor good. He is the spiritual atmosphere which conditions our spiritual life. And where God is, nothing is wholly trivial or vain. Everywhere, and in all circumstances, we can seek to find out and to follow after His nature and His will, for under all seasons and conditions, God's law, which is the revelation of Himself, the law of reason and the law of love, remains immutably the same. God is the basis, and God is the goal.

The Hebrews had not even learned the poor distinction which we may yet have to unlearn between the natural and the supernatural. The thunder, the rainbow, the blossom-

ing, and the harvest were to them no less divine than the burning bush on Horeb, or the voice from the cloud-wrapt summit of Sinai. Mystery enclosed them on every side. The realm of the unknown began at their fingers' ends—nay, it came close up to their inmost souls; for of nothing knew they less than of the contents and laws of their own being. All that they could say was, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made.' Nor could they conceive of a pulse-beat except as a throbbing of the Infinite Fountain of life.

4. Once more, the doctrine and conviction of God's omnipresence seem to give a better meaning to suffering and sorrow and pain. If, in the words of our text, we cannot escape from God's Spirit, it is also true that we cannot escape from His love. The one is as universal as the other, because the second is the manifestation of the first. Believing in God, we are led on to trust in His goodness, though appearances may belie it. Suffering and sorrow are means to an end (though the end will never be understood, for only God can know the fulness of His own will); nay more, they are *His* means, and through that one word their horror is lessened, and their poignancy assuaged.

Suffering is educational rather than punitive, and even in the midst of it we are not deserted of God. 'If I make Hades my bed, thou art there;' there is no darkness so thick that the Spirit of God cannot penetrate it, no misery which cannot be borne if it lead us nearer to Him.

Is it not a mere fact that for many ages there have lived and died men and women who, by the purity of their lives and souls, have been able to see in suffering not the vindictiveness but the goodness of God—men and women who would freely and soberly confess that it was the very sharpness of their trouble which had brought them closer and closer to God. When sorrow, as we say, does not soften, when it does not reveal God but obscures Him, or when suffering means degradation and sin and ignorance and undeserved defilement, then, indeed, we are tempted to murmur; then, indeed, we need all the faith which we can muster; all our certainty of human love to make us cling yet closer to its Divine original; but while the ordinary human suffering, through which we *can* become better if we do but choose, while only this suffering befalls us, it were unworthy of the best traditions of our humanity if we quailed before the blow. 'If Hades be my bed, yet Thou art there.'¹

5. The doctrine of the omnipresence serves, moreover, another purpose still. The God of childhood, the external God who has His dwelling in heaven, is bound to rule the world upon the lines of a benevolent Monarch, that is, externally.

¹ C. G. Montefiore.

He distributes reward and punishment, and these allotments of praise and blame are external to, and separate from, the actions or dispositions which were their cause. But the Omnipresent God cannot be conceived as rewarding or punishing externally. His rewards and punishments are internal, that is, they are the necessary concomitants and issues of the action and the character of man. If to draw near to God is man's true happiness, and to be withdrawn from Him is man's true misery, then we have here an ultimate or supreme standard by which to measure the true worth and glory of our lives.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears

I hid from Him, and under running laughter

Up vistaed hopes, I sped;

And shot, precipitated

Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,

From these strong Feet that followed, followed after,

But with unhurrying chase,

And unperturbed pace,

Deliberate speed, majestic instanoy,

They beat—and a Voice beat

More instant than the Feet—

'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'¹

6. If this dogma of God's omnipresence may enable us to live more worthily, calling out our full capacities, meagre though they be, of hope, of faith, and of love, will it not also enable us, when the need has come, to die worthily, too? For death itself cannot separate either ourselves or those we love from God; He has given, He has taken, blessed be the name of the Lord! For, though flesh waste away, God is still our portion and their portion; and if His love and His wisdom are manifested in life, they must also be manifested, whatever and however may be the outcome, in that passage and change which we speak of as death. Those we have honoured and loved must die, perchance in the spring-time of their youth, perchance in the fulness of their age; an instant more, an instant less, in God's sight it makes no difference. They pass, but they

¹ Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven*.

are with Him, even as we: nay, perhaps, we may say more truly, both of them and of ourselves: They are with God, where we, too, soon shall be.

The Chinese have a fairy tale about a stone monkey who was chosen king of the monkeys, and, having learned to jump many miles at a single jump, aspired to become Lord of the Sky. The Lord Buddha said to him, 'Come outside of the palace with me, and stand upon my hand. Then if you can jump out of my hand you shall be Lord of the Sky, but if not you shall be sent down to earth and never be allowed to come up to the sky any more.' The monkey jumped, and in a moment was far away out of sight. On he went in his jump until he came to the end of the earth. There he saw five great red pillars standing on the very edge, with nothing but empty space beyond. On one of them he scratched a mark to show how far he had jumped. Then he took another big jump, and in the twinkling of an eye was back again in the Lord Buddha's hand. 'When are you going to begin to jump?' the Lord Buddha asked. 'Why, I have jumped,' said the monkey, 'jumped to the very end of the earth. If you want to know how far I have been you have only to get on my back, and I'll take you there to see.' 'Look at this, monkey,' the Lord Buddha said, holding out his hand. On one of the fingers there was the very mark which the monkey had made on the red pillar. 'You see,' said the Lord Buddha, 'the whole world lies in my hand. You could never have jumped out of it. When you jumped, and thought you were out of sight, my hand was under you all the time. No one, not even a stone monkey, can ever get beyond my reach. Now go down to earth, and learn to keep in your proper place.'¹

O God, within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!

Life—that in me has rest,
As I—undying Life—have power in Thee!

With wide-embracing love
Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes cease to be,
'And thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void:
Thou—Thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be destroyed.²

¹ H. A. Giles, *Chinese Fairy Tales Told in English*.

² Emily Brontë.