

basis of the distribution of His attributes in Whose image we were created: "Qualis homo, talis Deus." Man is conscious of his own substantial being and identity through all changes: this suggests that God exists, apart from all phenomena. But man is conscious of three orders of self-manifestation or modes of consciousness: the three constituents of his existence are intellect, sensibility, will. Hence a threefold classification of the Divine attributes, so far as they are distinguished from His eternal essence. In modern times, and especially by the followers of Schleiermacher, the demands of man's religious need have been the regulator: a sense of dependence implying the absolute attributes, a sense of sin the moral perfections, and the whole being consummated by the revelation of love in Christ. Here, then, is undoubtedly a ground of truth. Every rational human thought of God springs from man's knowledge of himself. This is the grand prerogative of human nature that it is a reflection of the Divine. We either ascribe to our Maker the perfection of what is imperfect in ourselves, or we deny to Him what in ourselves we count evil. But it is obvious that there are relations of the Infinite to the finite, of the Creator to the creature, and of the Holy God to sinners, which forbid the carrying out of this principle of classification. It is enough to say concerning these methods that they have too much tendency to make man the measure of the Deity.

4. Guided by these principles of analysis, though not bound to any of them, we shall, first, consider the attributes pertaining to God as an absolute or unrelated Being; then, those arising out of the relation between the Supreme and the creature, which indeed require the creature for their manifestation; and, finally, those which belong to the relation between God and moral beings under His government, with special reference to man. The justification of this arrangement will appear in due course.

Analysis.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE ABSOLUTE ESSENCE.

**Attributes
of the
Absolute.**

The Divine essence, or the Absolute, regarded in itself and in itself alone, is to be conceived as pure spirit, unlimited by time or space, independent of all other existence,

in its perfect self knowing no change or process of development. As these are the attributes of a personal Being they may be summed up as spirituality, infinity, eternity, immensity, necessary selfsufficiency, unchangeableness, and perfection. These great words, carefully examined, are or suggest all the attributes of God which are immanent, independent of the creature, and essential to a right conception of His nature.

Spirituality.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD.

Spirituality is the attribute which most nearly and fully expresses the very essence of God as the one eternal substance in which all other attributes inhere. Hence the Scripture does not tell us that the Divine nature is spiritual; but our Lord, the only Revealer, declares that Πνεῦμα ὁ Θεός, GOD IS SPIRIT: the only definition He ever gave. This may be understood in two ways: first, positively, as the perfection of all that we know of spirit in our own consciousness; and, negatively, as excluding all that is inconsistent with our conception of pure spirit.

John iv.
24.

Personal. 1. The human spirit was created in the image of God. By the testimony of our consciousness the *Father of spirits* is a real, substantial Person, Whose personal selfconsciousness is that of a thinking or intelligent selfdetermining Agent. The Scriptures abound with testimonies, pervading their whole structure, that He holds intercourse with man as a Spirit with spirit. This is and ought to be accepted as the foundation of all religion.

Heb. xii. 9

Why Revealed. 2. This attribute is not generally asserted of God in an abstract manner, or as defining His nature. It is appealed to for two purposes: to guard our conceptions of the Object of our worship from everything that would debase it; and, to impress upon us a sense of the dignity of our origin and the grandeur of our vocation as worshippers of the One, Triune, Eternal Spirit.

Pure Spirit.

(1.) Of what pure spirit is we can form no notion. The word gives little help, as it simply expresses the breathing forth which in its influence is πνεῦμα: an invisible energy, known by its effects. All pure being, especially spiritual being, as underlying its pheno-

mena, is beyond our grasp. But, in thinking of the highest Spirit, we put away every idea of the limitations which belong to our own spirit. The attribute gives us the simplicity and unity of the Divine uncompounded nature; its immateriality, immortality, and invisibility. Therefore the term is, after all, the predicate of a personal God, distinct from the material and created universe. Pantheism has always seemed in words to deny this: seldom in reality. Some of the greatest leaders of Pantheistic thought have been better than their creed: filled with the idea of a universal directing Spirit, but forgetting that He is and can be in His own nature only Spirit.

(2.) Of that God in His Triune essence, and of each Person in the unity of the Godhead, as the object of worship, spirituality is predicated. This attribute belongs to the absolute Godhead as before all creaturely existence. But it is brought into relation with the economy of redemption. Of the Father in that economy, it is said, *Whom no man hath seen nor can see!* Of the Son: *to the King eternal* (of the worlds and dispensations, *τὸν αἰῶνος*), *immortal, invisible!* *The Lord is Spirit.* The Holy Ghost, holy in His function and relation to redemption, is by His very name *τὸ Πνεῦμα*. Hence the worship of God must be spiritual: not indeed as formless and void and without material aids, but as the homage of spirit to Spirit: *They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.* The Apostle Paul teaches the Gentiles, through their own teachers, that *we are also His offspring*; and the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of that God as *the Father of spirits*. In the former passage the inference is a remarkable one: from the spiritual essence in man to the spirituality of God and of His perfect service. In the latter, which echoes the words of the Old Testament, *The God of the spirits of all flesh*, the duty of subjection and the privilege of LIFE in the fullest sense are connected with it. God *only hath immortality*—that is, the essential incorruptibility of Spirit—and of His incorruptible immortality the indivisibility and indestructibility of the human spirit is an image and a gift.

The
Triune
Object of
Worship

1 Tim. i.
17.
2 Cor. iii.
17.
John iv.
24.
Deut. iv.
15—19.
John iv.
24.
Isa. xl. 18,
25.
Acts xvii.
28.
Heb. xii.
9.
Numb.
xvi. 22;
xvii.
16.
1 Tim. vi.
16.

THE INFINITY OF GOD.

Infinity.

There is no idea concerning God more necessary to the human mind than that He is Infinite in His being and perfections and

all that is His : that whatever is to be predicated of Him is to be infinitely predicated, or without limitation. But while this is an indispensable requisite of every thought concerning the Supreme, it is, at the same time, an idea that must for ever overwhelm the finite mind which must nevertheless entertain it.

Only in
God.

1. The notion of the Infinite belongs only to God, to Whom alone of all objects of thought it is, strictly speaking, applicable. No other subject of this predicate has or can have a real existence. There is no meaning in the terms "infinite space" and "infinite duration;" space is nothing save as occupied, but what occupies it must be limited; and duration implies some limited thing that endures. It is only when it is made the attribute of a Being, and one Being, that the word has, strictly speaking, any meaning.

Positive
and
Negative.

2. Infinity is a positive notion in a negative form : that it is a mere negation of limits springs from the finite nature of our own understanding; that it is a positive judgment or affirmation of our minds, and in our own indestructible conviction something more than mere negation, is a tribute to the essential nobleness of the human intellect. When we say that we ourselves are finite we mean more than a mere denial of our infinity : we express a real judgment concerning our own and every creaturely existence to which the standard of infinity is applied. So when we say that God is infinite we express the sacred thought that He is beyond the circumscription and the comprehension of our understanding.

Care in
using it.

3. It is important to remember that the word infinite is one of our own making, and not employed in Scripture. It must be narrowly watched and guarded in its application to the Supreme. It belongs to Him not as abstract essence but as a Personal Spirit. Nothing but confusion can arise from applying it to the nature of God as if that were capable of diffusion and its expansion regarded as going on to infinity. The human mind is not capable of thinking save under the conditions of time and space. The Infinite is revealed to faith as above the condition of time, and of this Eternity is the expression; as above the conditions of space, and of this Immensity is the expression. Infinity in philosophical precision has nothing to do with God's relation to the economy of created things; nor is it right to ask how anything can exist which is not God if God be infinite. This term belongs

Eternity.
Immen-
sity.

rather to His attributes than to Himself. An infinite Spirit is infinite in the attributes of spirit: in knowledge, in power, and in what we call in human language resources. If it is urged that an unlimited Being must include all being, the only answer—besides the unfailing acknowledgment of our utter incapacity to argue on such subjects—is that an infinite Spirit must by the very term be able to create finite existences.

THE IMMENSITY OF GOD.

Immen-
sity.

1. The Immensity of God is only once declared in Scripture; but when it is said that *Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee*, a formula is used which expresses the universal sentiment of revelation and precisely defines the supremacy of the Eternal Spirit over all conditions of space. It is not that He fills immensity with His presence: He is the only Immensity, all things created being measurable and limited. The universe CANNOT CONTAIN Him: not because His essence stretches beyond the confines of created things, but because His eternal Spirit transcends and is inconsistent with all notions of space. Space is born out of His immensity, as time out of His eternity: but none can declare the generation of either. This incomprehensible attribute of the pure and absolute Divine essence is the ground of His omnipresence, hereafter to be considered. Because, while above and independent of all space, He can, when space and all that it inherit come into existence at His fiat, fill all with His presence. It can hardly be said that the Immensity of God is the negative of which His ubiquity is the positive. Both are positive conceptions; strictly related to each other and yet very different. The former lifts our thought to the overwhelming contemplation of a Being above all created existence; the latter teaches us to draw the necessary inference that the Creator of all things is present to every creature, or, putting this in a better form, that every creature throughout space is present to Him.

2 Chron.
vi. 18.

2. This eternal attribute is in Scripture appealed to for two purposes: first, to bring near the thought of the Divine omnipresence; secondly, and chiefly, to guard us against unduly localising our conception of the Object of worship. *In Him we live and move and have our being*: as our time is enfolded by the

Why
RevealedActs xvi.
28.

- Divine eternity, so our place is in the bosom of the Divine immensity. *Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.*
- Jer. xviii. 23, 24. The response is that of holy fear: *Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, and whither shall I flee from Thy presence? and of holy confidence: Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.* But when the Temple was dedicated, in which Jehovah would dwell with His people, the Holy Ghost inspired Solomon's sublime appeal already quoted: *But who is able to build Him a house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?* It is not enough for us in our worship to remember that our God is everywhere present, that He is our Father in heaven; we must remember also that He is beyond and above even the heavens: *Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.* It is a high flight to the thought of a Being Who is everywhere present; it is a still higher thought that we are in the presence of One Who is above all space and time.
- Psal. cxxxix. 7. 2 Chron. ii. 6. Is. lxvi. 1.

Eternity.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

1. What the Divine immensity is to space the Divine eternity is to time. That God is eternal is the constant declaration of Scripture: in fact this is a predicate more habitual than any other, being the first revelation of Himself to His people, I AM THAT I AM, and continued in a variety of other forms down to the end, when it returns to the first, *Which is, and Which was, and Which is to come, the Almighty.* It must be remembered, however, that very few of the passages which introduce the word assign the absolute attribute we are now considering to God. The Name which declares His essential, necessary, underived being sufficiently sustains the doctrine of the Divine eternity.
- Ex. iii. 14. Rev. i. 8. Gen. xxi. 33. Is. xl. 28.
- In one memorable passage it is said that *Abraham called there on the name of Jehovah, the Everlasting God, or THE GOD OF ETERNITY, יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים* which once more occurs in the prophet: *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord—יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, the God of eternity, Jehovah—the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?*