

invested with His attributes in perfection as His creatures are invested with them imperfectly. But here our safeguard is to remember that in the simplicity of the eternal essence there can be nothing composite: the whole essence is in each attribute: God is All in all, All in each. Accordingly it follows that we can think of no such accidental attribute as may be and is in everything that is not God; as man, for instance, may or may not have wisdom. There is no perfection in the Supreme that is not of His essence. Thus, while we reject what may be called the Sabellian theology of the Divine attributes—each is distinct in the unity of the supreme nature—in the Glory of God all the several components of His nature blend into one.

3. Hence it may be said that only through the way of the Divine attributes can we reach a definition of the Divine nature. There is a sense indeed in which the being of God is absolutely undefinable, because absolutely incomprehensible. But, as to define is rather to separate or distinguish from everything else than to explain what is thus defined or marked off, there is nothing more amenable to definition than the nature of God. Of course, to think of genus and species is here out of the question. But we may speak of God as a subject with all good predicates, and with these in their infinite perfection: of no other object of knowledge can we speak with equal confidence. In His essence He is the Being of beings: the Source, Sustainer, and End of all things that are. But this already expresses His difference from all that is not Himself. To express that difference fully is to enumerate the perfections of His nature. We cannot sanctify Him in our hearts from every other object without thinking of or naming His attributes. The moment definition begins these are absolutely necessary. Indeed, we have no notion of Deity which does not connote some idea which severs the conception from all other conceptions. Every thought of God involves the thought of His attributes: without these He is verily and indeed an unknown and an unknowable God.

CLASSIFICATION.

In systematic theology the attributes require classification. Our best guide, the Scripture, gives hints and specimens of an

Principles
of Classifi-
cation.

arrangement of its abundant materials ; and such an arrangement tends, as will be seen, to elucidate their connection with the various branches of the system of revelation. To exhibit them merely in an orderly series involves too great a sacrifice to simplicity. But it is as difficult as it is important to determine the guiding principles of such a classification.

Twofold
Cor-
relatives.

1. The favourite method has been to make a division into two counterpart classes. Hence they are distributed as natural and moral by a distinction which the meaning of neither of these words will allow : both are inappropriate to the Deity, and the harshness is not removed if metaphysical and ethical are substituted. The instinctive objection we feel to these terms is not felt to the correlatives of absolute and relative, immanent and transitive, internal and external : these distinctions furnish the right clue and are sound so far as they go ; but they do not suggest those special manifestations of God which give their peculiar glory to Christian theology. It is dangerous to speak of positive and negative attributes ; for while there is no positive excellence in Deity which does not imply negation or its opposite, the negative ideas of infinity and so forth are really and truly positive. Lastly, when they are classed as communicable and incommunicable, it must be remembered that, as attributes, all are alike incommunicable to the creature.

Method of
reaching
them.

2. Secondly, the names and perfections of God have been ordered with reference to the method by which we attain, or may be supposed to attain, our conceptions of them. The Mediæval doctors taught that we arrive at adequate notions of the Divine perfections, first, "*via negationis* :" by the instinctive denial of limitation and defect to the Supreme ; secondly, "*via eminentiæ* :" by ascribing to Him the most eminent possession of what in us or in our idea is good ; thirdly, "*via causalitatis*," by making Him the actual, virtual, or permissive cause of every effect observable in the economy of things. This scholastic method has always commended itself by its simplicity, though it is liable to some of the objections that render the former method doubtful : especially it fails in its application to the attributes which are concerned with human redemption.

From
Human
Nature.

3. Thirdly, it has been sought to make our own nature the

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.

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,