

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. xxi. 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.

## 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, undervived being sufficiently sustains the doctrine of the Divine eternity.
- Ex. iii. 14.** In one memorable passage it is said that *Abraham called there on the name of Jehovah, the Everlasting God, or THE GOD OF ETERNITY, יהוה אל עילם* which once more occurs in the prophet:
- Rev. i. 8.** *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord—יהוה אלֹהִים עילם* the God of eternity, Jehovah—the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?
- Gen. xxi. 33.** In one memorable passage it is said that *Abraham called there on the name of Jehovah, the Everlasting God, or THE GOD OF ETERNITY, יהוה אל עילם* which once more occurs in the prophet:
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Undoubtedly in these, and some other passages, the word eternal has its profound meaning of time HIDDEN in the abyss of eternity. But it will be found that all the terms generally used carry with them the notion of successive duration indefinitely extended, and therefore fall short of the pure conception of eternal. Hence they are explained with that meaning by many paraphrases: such as, *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God*, where duration to come and duration past are alike unlimited; and mean, though they do not say, that Jehovah is above all time, יְהוָה, the *Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity*. The variations are very sublime on the idea of duration lost in timelessness, before and after creation: *I am the First and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God*, where still the idea of duration enters. *One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*: here duration is all but gone. St. Paul calls God the *King eternal, immortal, invisible*: here it is the *King of ages*, just as it is said that *He made the ages or worlds*. From all this it is plain that, while the abstract idea is wanting in Scriptural expression, it is not wanting in the Scriptural doctrine. Eternity is expressed in finite terms.

2. But the perfect idea of eternity, as it is in the human mind, cannot tolerate duration or succession of thoughts as necessary to the Divine consciousness. And this is the deep perplexity of our human intellect, which however must accept the profound meaning of the name I AM, as teaching an eternal now enfolding and surrounding the successive existence of time. The personal Jehovah once and once only declared His pure eternity. His name is the only word which human language affords in its poverty to express that thought: such terms as eternal and everlasting have temporal notions clinging to them; and all our phrases go no further than that the Supreme fills all space and time, and that He was before them, the very word before carrying duration with it. But I AM—before Time or Space was, I AM—has in it all the strength of eternity. It is literally the assertion of pure existence, without distinction of past and present and future: that is, of past and present and future as measured in time and regulated by motion in space. We must

Eternal  
Now.

accept this doctrine of God in all its incomprehensibleness, as the only one that satisfies the mind. The Eternal in Himself knows no succession of time any more than He knows circumscription of space ; and, when He created all things, His being remains as independent of duration as it is independent of locality. No attribute, however, has given rise to more discussion than this. The deepest thinkers of all ages have consented to annihilate in the Divine essence all that we mean by time and succession of thought. They have agreed to speak of a *Duratio tota simul*, of an *Æternitas* in which *fuisse et futurum esse non est sed SOLUM ESSE*. And the name Jehovah—the Name of God and of each of the Three Persons in the Godhead—demands and sanctions this. It is utterly vain to attempt to penetrate this abyss of mystery : it is equally fruitless either to fight against it or to illustrate it.

**Discussion of this subject.** 3. Opponents of this truth deny that there can be duration without succession ; but duration is succession ; both words are equally inappropriate to the Eternal who simply is. They insist also that to take from a personal being the act and operations of successive thinking is to destroy its personality. But that is simply arguing from our finite nature—which cannot think but under conditions of time and space—to the Infinite which by the very definition knows no such limits. The only answer possible to all such objections is the common apology required everywhere by this subject : we cannot search out the Divine Being unto perfection ; though the perfection in which we are lost allows no past to recede before God and no future to rise before Him. When the argument takes another form, and we are pointed to the tenor of Scriptural representations that speak of the Eternal as having purposes which have been fulfilled and are in course of fulfilment, our reply must be cautiously and yet boldly given. Time is the creation of the Eternal God, Who *made the ages*. It is, with all its endless phenomena and laws, a reality to Him Who brought it into being ; and all its succession unfolds in His presence as past and present and future. Our only difficulty is to hold fast the truth that He sustains two relations to time. As the abiding Eternal One He views it in its place, Himself absolutely unconnected with it. As the God who works out for the creature and with the creature His own purposes He beholds,

directs, and controls all things as under the law to time. This is of course a deep mystery to human thought: that is, to conceive of eternal willing and temporal acting, of a timeless and successionless Agent working out and watching the evolution of His plans. But the mystery, such as it is, is only that of the Incarnation anticipated; and, as we receive this, we may receive that. We may dare to say that the Eternal inhabits eternity; and yet that in the Son, the Firstborn before every creature, He inhabits time also. As in the incarnation God is manifest in the flesh, so in the creation God is manifest in time. And as God will be for ever manifest in His incarnate Son, so will He for ever have in and through His Son, the Vicegerent of created things, a manifestation in time: that is to say, in plain words, eternity and time will henceforward and for ever coexist. Something pertaining to time will cease: its change and probation and opportunity. In this sense *χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται*; but in no other sense than this.

Analogy  
with the  
Incarna-  
tion.

Rev. x. 6  
Eternity  
in our  
Nature.

4. Illustrations are on this subject of no great value. And yet they are not utterly worthless. One has just been used, the analogy with the Incarnation. No exception can be taken to this: as the Son thinks and feels and acts as a man while still the Eternal God, so the Eternal God thinks and feels and acts amidst the creaturely conditions of time. The phenomenal universe is a rehearsal of the Incarnation. But in this case the illustration is as unfathomable as the thing illustrated. Other illustrations are frequently suggested which involve a disguised Pantheism, and should therefore be steadily avoided. For instance, when it is said that time is the shadow of eternity, or the element of continuity amidst changing phenomena, the successional existence of God is made eternal. Pantheism asks nothing more than this. There is indeed a dim and fleeting but an impressive adumbration of the sublime idea nearer home, in the very constitution of our nature. An apocryphal writer has told us that God *made man in the image of His own eternity*. And the canonical Preacher, after describing all the ordinances and arrangements of time in their season, adds in a mysterious sentence: *He hath made everything beautiful in his time. Also He hath set eternity in their heart*, אֲתָה דְּעַלְמָם נָתָן בְּלִבָּם, *and that no man can find out the work that God worketh from the beginning to the end*. The thought or the instinct or the

Eccles.  
iii. 11

desire of eternity for ever points the worker in time to an unfathomable mystery of the Divine purpose beyond time. Man knows or feels that he is linked with eternity and surrounded by it. This deep mystery in his inmost soul gives him desires and anticipations that transcend time and space. Sometimes this sense of the infinite or of the eternal seems for a season to annihilate the succession of his thoughts, and his contemplation of God raises him above all limitation. From this sublime ecstasy, however, he evermore awakes; but not without a dim presentiment of what time will be when it is swallowed up, without being lost, in the abyss of eternity.

Selfsuffi-  
ciency.

#### THE SELFSUFFICIENCY OF GOD.

No notion we can form of God is more important in its meaning and in its issues than that He is selfsufficient, or that of His necessary eternal *avápkeia*.

Causa  
Sui.

1. We use our own feeble words when we say that it is a necessity of thought that the Being who is the ground of all existence should be Himself an eternal necessity. All things have their cause and their end in Him: He can have no cause nor end out of Himself. He is the one, sole, selforiginated, independent, unconditioned and absolute Being. Here the eternal name

**Ex. iii. 14.** JEHOVAH, I AM, again comes in. The idea of causation carries us to One Essential Existence; but cannot go behind that. It is a very loose employment of the term to add that He is Causa Sui, **Is. xl:iii.** His own cause: He simply, purely, and eternally IS. *Before Me there was no God formed!* To all the best thoughts and instincts of **Is. xliv. 8.** our created nature He may say: *Ye are even My witnesses, Is there* **Is. xliv. 6.** *a God beside Me? I am the First, and I am the last, and beside Me there is no God!*

All Possi-  
bilities.

2. Although this immanent and absolute attribute by its very name shuts out the creature, and points to a Being Who needs nothing to complement or complete His perfection, it nevertheless implies that in the infinity of His resources are all the possibilities and potentialities of the created universe. When we exchange the terms Necessary, Independent, Selfexistent, for that of Allsufficient, we begin to think of the eternal resources that