

attribute. It is placed first in the order of perfections which connote the created universe because it is really the first in the order of our thought. Without it the formula God and the universe has no meaning. It translates the Eternal from the region of abstract necessity and uniformity of existence into the reality of a Personal Spirit acting with free intelligence. It accounts for all things as they have been, as they are, and as they will be. Before it the *Moira*, or Fate, of eternal necessity binding the universe vanishes. Before it Pantheism flies, which allows no personal will either in God or in what seems, but seems only, to be His creation. Before it also, when rightly interpreted, recedes, or ought to recede, every system that makes the probation of intelligent creatures only the circuitous evolution of a fixed purpose called the sovereign will of God.

Christian
Panthe-
ism.

OMNIPOTENCE.

Omnipotence.

The Divine Omnipotence follows hard on the Divine Freedom : indeed it is but the expansion of the result of will in effect ; in this case its expansion to infinity. It is the attribution to God of power to do all that He wills to do ; according to the simple formula of the prophet : *There is nothing too hard for Thee. He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.* He can do all that He wills to do ; He wills to do all that He does. *Potest quod vult*, in its application to the Deity, is sound theology ; though the converse, that He wills all that He can, is to be rejected. Proceeding from this principle, we may dwell on a few important inferences.

Jer. xxxii.
17.
Ps. cxv. 3

1. The omnipotence of God is the ground and secret of all efficiency, or what we call causality. No argument, however specious, can rob us of the indestructible conviction that there is such a power in the nature of things as we call cause : that there is a connection between events which is more than mere sequence. As in regard to almost every attribute of God, but in this case with more than usual distinctness, we perceive in ourselves the finite reflection of the Infinite. We are conscious of producing effects as ourselves their cause. From that, remembering two things, we rise to the Divine Omnipotence. First, the range of our direct causation is exceedingly limited : very decisive so far as it extends,

Causality.

it soon reaches its term. In the interior economy of our spiritual nature it is comparatively great; in the government of our bodily constitution less; in our action upon others it has decreased rapidly; and in our action upon external nature it is gone. To the Supreme there is no limit: *with God all things are possible* follows, in our Lord's words, *with men this is impossible*, and may have the largest application. *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places. Jehovah spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast.*

Secondly, all power in us is derived from Him: He is the absolute source of all causation. It is not simply that He can do all things; but all things that are done are done by the operation of causes that owe their efficiency to Him, though in many cases the efficiency is contrary to His will. But this leads to another view: the necessary limitation or condition—if such language may be used—of the Divine omnipotence.

2. As to the display of Almighty power, it is and must be, if the Divine freedom is maintained, for ever restricted. It is not indeed a limitation that omnipotence cannot accomplish the impossible: the impossible is impossible because His nature makes it so; even as it is inconceivable that His holiness should tolerate evil. It is more important to bear in mind that the Infinite Cause can never exhaust itself: the actual must always fall short of the possible: *Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him!* Were it otherwise, the Divine freedom would be gone, and Pantheism reign in its stead. To assume that the sum of finite things is the full expression of the Divine Almightyness is to confound the faculty with its exercise: that which is irrational in relation to man is equally irrational in relation to God. This error is really based upon a notion of the Absolute which is impatient of admitting that it can have any project which requires means for its accomplishment and thus involve the thought that God is equal, so to speak, to the production of what He wills. Holy Scripture assents to what is true in this: it is everywhere faithful to the original declaration: *Let there be light, and there was light.* It may be granted that the will of God is His act, that is, when He wills that it should be so; but the converse is equally certain, that He may will not to act, and

Matt. xix.
26.
Psalm
cxxxv 6.
Psalm
xxxiii. 9.

Limita-
tion ?

Job xxvi.
14.

Gen. i 3.

infinite varieties of being are not in existence that might be. Nothing is gained by transcendental speculations as to the identity in God of will and act. Such speculations simply trifle with words; if will means will and act means act, they fall to the ground. The same remark as to dishonest or unreal use of words is in other respects of wide application.

3. Once more, the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme conditionate His omnipotence. Here, then, is a twofold range of suggestion: one more simple and comprehensible; the other bringing us to the threshold of unfathomable mystery. It is not difficult to understand that in the providential arrangements of the universe omnipotent agency is limited by wisdom. There is a definite and clear distinction between what is sometimes called the *POTESTAS ABSOLUTA*, or the absolute power that creates all at first, and places it under the government of secondary laws which represent the *POTESTAS ORDINATA*. This distinction between the supreme and the economical omnipotence of the Creator is important in many applications. It does justice to the regular, orderly, uninterrupted process of created things, in which occasional interventions are rare, and indeed no more than exceptions to general rule. But it gives room for these interventions in creation itself, and in the miracles which sometimes introduce a new creation into the old. The one idea of the Divine Omnipotence reconciles the two and harmonises with both. But there is another aspect of the subject before which the human mind must bow down in amazement. In the infinite wisdom of God things contrary to His will in one sense are permitted by His will in another. This leads us up to the original mystery that the Almighty created beings capable of falling from Him; and down again to the present mystery that omnipotence sustains in being creatures opposing His authority; and then forward to the same mystery in its consummate form that omnipotence will preserve in being, not indeed active rebels against His authority, but spirits separated from Himself. It is the solemn peculiarity of this attribute, in common with wisdom and goodness, as we shall see, that it is traversed and thwarted, so to speak, by the creatures that owe to it their origin. But the same three attributes are conspicuous in the redeeming economy: of which more hereafter.

Condi-
tions of
Omni-
potence.

Potestas
Absoluta
and
Ordinata