

- John xvii. 21. it is so now that the creature exists: to this our Lord bears witness when He says, *As Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee!* And when He adds *that they also may be one in us*, He raises our minds to the thought that the communion of the creature with the Creator is the reflection in time of that communion which subsists among the Persons of the Godhead in eternity.
- Majesty and Blessedness. 5. Here, then, we locate the attributes which, when creatures begin to exist to name them, we call Majesty and Blessedness. By the former we ascribe to Deity the glory of perfections which are essentially above the creaturely excellence: not placing Him at the summit, but above all; as Michael, the highest creature, by his very name cries, *Who is like unto God?* By the latter we ascribe to Him the most absolute freedom from all that can impair well-being and the infinity of that which by its communication makes the creature blessed. *Who is over all, God blessed for ever* / expresses both, assigning most emphatically both to the Second Person in the Unity of the Three.
- Rom. ix. 5.

#### Immutability.

#### THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

After what has been said few words are necessary on the unchangeableness of the Divine essence. The Word of God makes few references to it save as it is implied in the eternal name: its allusions to the subject are generally connected with the steadfast perpetuity of the Divine counsels, and will be considered elsewhere. But there are some points of theological importance arising out of it for which this is the appropriate place.

- Being and Phenomena. 1. There are sublime passages which lift our contemplation to the thought of the unchangeableness of the Eternal as contrasted with the fleeting phenomena of the universe; and therefore must be interpreted of the absolute Divine essence. These combine the infinity, eternity, and immutability of God in their glorious aggregate. One only need be quoted, the peculiarity of which is twofold: first, that it most expressly marks the beginning or the very earliest foundations of all created phenomena; and, secondly, that it is quoted from the Old Testament in the New and assigned to the Son of God Who became incarnate. *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are*
- Heb. i. 10, 11, 12.

*the works of Thine hands. They shall perish, but Thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment. And as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up and they shall be changed ; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.*

2. This attribute excludes all process of becoming, or development, and whatever is meant by change, or the possibility of change. In His essence and in all the attributes of His essential being, God is for ever the same. And of Him alone can this be predicated : any creature, whether spirit or matter, or a union of the two, becomes what it was not, and reaches a fixed state only by the Divine will : if indeed development does not belong to it for ever. And the interior mystery of the Triune Personality does not affect this truth, which is consistent with an eternal generation of the Son, and procession of the Spirit, in the interior essence of Deity.

No Development

3. In the incomprehensibility of the Divine nature, this attribute is also to be reconciled with unbounded activity or mobility when it is brought into relation to the creature ; and, in relation to the moral creature, with the changeable manifestation of an eternal purpose. As to the former, more will be said on the Freedom of the Creator ; and, as to the latter, we meet the immutability of the Moral Governor in His Fidelity to His own fixed decrees, whether of judgment or of mercy. That philosophical theology which loses the personal God in the abstract Absolute has greatly erred in its conception of this attribute. As the Eternal conducts the creaturely universe through an economy of time, in which His eternity is reflected, so also He conducts it through an economy of change, behind and below and above the variations of which He can say : *I am Jehovah, I change not.* Argument is utterly useless here. It is the highest reason to submit to this necessary antinomy or paradox.

Not Im-mobility.

Mal. iii. 6.

4. Though there is no process of development in the essence of the Godhead, it must be remembered that the profoundest and most awful mystery of the Faith proclaims an evolution of the Divine nature as manifested in redemption : To return once more to the essential Name, I AM THAT I AM means also I AM WHAT I WILL TO BE, and forbids our limiting in any way the possibilities of Divine manifestation as exhibited in the Media-

Immutability and Incarnation.

Ex. iii. 14.

torial Trinity, and especially in the exinanition of the Son. Concerning Him, Jehovah-Jesus, it is said that He is *the Same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*. But He *emptied Himself* before He took upon Him the form of a servant: He changed before the Incarnation, or in the Incarnation, the mode of His existence and surrendered the glory of attributes which were nevertheless immutably His. The unchangeableness of the Divine nature is not affected even by this; though no created intelligence can fathom the secret. The eternal generation of the Son becomes another generation in time: *This day have I begotten Thee* in human nature was said to Him in His human existence of Whom in His Divine eternity it is said *Thou art My Son!*

Heb. xiii.  
8.  
Phil. ii. 7.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
Psalm ii.  
7.

The  
Perfection  
of God.

#### THE PERFECTION OF GOD.

We sum up all when in our own speech we say that the Divine Nature is Perfect. As God is the Being of beings, His supreme perfection is the perfection of all perfections. This attribute consummates and harmonizes all the rest; representing, as it were, the undivided glory of the several rays of the Divine character. The perfection we reverently ascribe to God is unique and employs the term in a sense applicable to no other being. It is absolute, not relative; it is one, and not the result of the combination of qualities; it is necessary, and excludes the possibility of defect; it is supreme and immutable, not the finish of a process; it is the ground and standard and source of all other perfection. By these poor sentences we labour to express the essential difference between the perfectness of God and the perfectness of the creature. But the importance of this attribute is found in its use as a reverent defence of the adorable nature from all that would dishonour it in our thoughts or in our theological systems. If we sacrifice any one attribute to any other we derogate from the perfection of God Who is the Being in Whom every attribute has its supreme existence and manifestation. As it belongs essentially to God in Himself, so it impresses its stamp on all the Divine works, and must give the law to all our theological views of His character. Holy Scripture, which dwells so much on the absolute perfections of the Godhead, does not often,

perhaps never does, call Him in His eternal essence perfect. This needs no assertion, nor does it need demonstration. The only passage in which the attribute is given Him is one of the very few instances in which the Incarnate Son assigns anything like a specific character to His Father and our Father: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect.* Matt. v. 48.

## OBSERVATIONS.

Observations.

Before leaving this class of Divine essential perfections, we must impress upon our minds the following observations:

1. They are all and alike incomprehensible and unfathomable, though each conveys a definite notion both to reason and to faith or rather to that consummate reason which is faith. In studying out these absolute attributes we are in the presence of a God Whom we strive to think of as existing in the awful solitude of His own essential being; and of Him we must needs say, with more than the prophet's meaning: *Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself.* Isa. xlv. 15. Here, if anywhere, we move in the region of pure thought; and of thought which is more passive than active. We use certain terms, but when we strive to shape them into concepts we are utterly baffled. We speak of infinity, eternity, immensity or spacelessness, immutability; but our words return upon us without the exact ideas they define. By no possibility can we grasp their meaning. And yet it is the glory of our created intellect—stamped with the image of God—that we still persist in believing that our ideas of Deity are sound and true: that there is a Being of Whom all this may and must be said. Our reason is our faith; for we believe in the indestructible convictions of our consciousness of God. Our faith is our reason; for every argument leads to the conclusion that such a Being must be. This is the valid inference we deduce from our own finiteness, which is strictly speaking nothing but a negation of the Infinite: not the converse. Our very idea of limitation implies an Unlimited with which we compare ourselves. Every thought of finite imperfection implies a standard of infinite perfection: what other meaning can these words have?

Unsearchableness of these Ideas.

Isa. xlv. 15.

Their Truth.

2. But, whenever we think of God as the perfection of what in