

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.

Observa-
tions.

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.* 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?

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

Unsearch-
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of these
Ideas.

Isa. xlv.
15.

Their
Truth.

**Personal
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ourselves is imperfect, we think as persons, and must needs think of Him as a Personal Being. Here we find a special difficulty : though it may be said that the difficulty is self-created, or rather that it springs very much from the poverty of our words. All these attributes of the eternal essence of God are described by terms that are not very appropriate as referred to personal spirit. Thus when we speak of the immensity or of the immutability of the eternal God we are applying language derived from the relations of material things to One Who is a pure spirit ; and the impropriety of the terms reflects its difficulty on the doctrine. The material notion inhering suggests the thought of a vast inonotonous essence extending beyond all limit that we can assign, and undergoing no process of living development. If we change the terms we get rid of this anomaly. God is a Personal Spirit, infinite and eternal, ever the same in His nature and mode of being, and not thinking or acting of necessity under the limitations of time and space. Reference has been again and again made to the difficulties of speculation which wonders at the idea of the Absolute or Infinite being defined off from all that is not Himself by personality ; but without the Infinite I speaking to the finite Thou there can be no science of God and no religion. Theology at least should have no difficulty here. It must either renounce itself and abdicate, or accept a personal God, of Whom these absolute attributes are to be predicated only as they are made consistent with His personality. The vain attempt to reconcile an impersonal Absolute with a personal thinker about it must be left to philosophy ; though all philosophy worthy of the name rejects and despairs the task. The question will for ever return upon it : How can personality, conscious of itself and of its origin from something not itself, spring from impersonality ?

**The
Absolute
versus
Person-
ality.**

3. Once more, it is an observable fact that this class of attributes, which we predicate of the absolute Deity, as yet unrelated to any creature, is brought into very express and clear connection with the Triune God as such. It has been seen, and we need now only to impress the fact again, that the Scriptures plainly declare the Personal Son to be eternal and immutable ; and the Third Person to be an eternal spiritual essence, the Holy Spirit preeminently. To us there is no Deity but the Triune ; and

**Belonging
to Three
Persons.**

Heb. i. 2, 10; xiii. 8.

these absolute attributes are predicated of all that is in God. It would be hardly too much to say that they are as often and as distinctly referred to the Son as to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit as to the Son. No one can carefully read the Scriptures without seeing that the supreme Name which binds this class of primary perfections into one is given to the Three Persons distinctively and in their unity. The one Jehovah—the Eternal, Infinite, Immutable Spirit—is the Three-one God. Proofs have already been given of this most fundamental truth, on which hangs the whole fabric of the Christian revelation. And, in harmony with it, we have done well to study the doctrine of the Trinity before entering on that of the Divine attributes.

4. They are the basis on which rest, or the source from which spring, all our other ascriptions to the Divine Being as related to the universe. In other words, the perfections to which we next pass are these in another form and application: not other perfections, but the same as exhibited towards the creature. In dwelling upon the attributes of the Divine essence, as they are brought within the range of their finite operation, it must always be remembered that the essential, immanent, incomprehensible prerogatives form the awful background of every representation. If the Divine Being gives His character and works a human exhibition—if, by what is called anthropomorphic language, He speaks **AS A MAN**, or adopts creaturely language—His eternal and infinite nature is behind as the standard and regulator of all: a truth of boundless importance, too often forgotten.

Basis of
all other
Attri-
butes.

ATTRIBUTES RELATED TO THE CREATURE

The attributes which connect the Supreme Being with the created universe, or which derive their new names and applications from that connection, are such as may be understood by the terms Freedom, Omnipotence, Omnipresence, Omniscience, Wisdom, and Goodness. To blend them all in one proposition: The God of the universe is a self-determining Agent, using unbounded power, which is everywhere operative, is guided by infinite knowledge,

Relative
Attri-
butes.