

what appears like the adjustment of means to ends is no other than the evolution of an infinite series of ends all expanding and converging to an ulterior and perfect end in eternity.

3. Hence, while in the Old Testament the economy of nature is the sphere of the Divine wisdom, in the New it is the economy of grace in which it most gloriously reigns. In the provisions of redemption for the accomplishment of His supreme end we have the *wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world began*. Here is wisdom in the deepest sense: the very *foolishness of God is wiser than men*. The attribute, studied in the light of the Cross, puts on its highest perfection. It is now far beyond the adjustment of means to an end: it is that, but it is infinitely more than that. It is the infinite knowledge of the abysses of His own Triune Being, and of the possibilities of reconciliation with the sinner through the resources of His own essence, brought into exhibition in a counsel of infinite wisdom. Hence this attribute has given its name both to the Gospel and to the Lord of the Gospel: *Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God*. Here, however, we are going beyond the strict limits of the present class of attributes; and further enlargement on this subject must be postponed.

In the
Gospel.

Eph. i. 8;
iii. 10.
1 Cor. ii. 7.
1 Cor. i.
25.

1 Cor.
i. 24;
ii. 6, 7.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Goodness

Goodness, as the last of this series of attributes, expresses the Divine sentiment which wills the good of all creatures as such.

1. It is not His excellence in Himself, which is ascribed to Him in other forms; but His benevolence in willing good and His beneficence in doing good to every work of His hands in need of both. The Fountain of life is the fountain also of loving-kindness: *The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. His tender mercies are over all His works*. It is no less than a law of the Divine nature to make the universe minister to the happiness of its inhabitants, and to communicate happiness to all creatures capable of it. This is demanded by the ascription of goodness to God as a perfection of His nature in its relation to the creature. To this relation we now limit ourselves; and may boldly say, guided by the Word of God, that His diffusive goodness is every-

Bene-
volence.

Ps. lxxiii.
5.
Ps. cxlv. 2

Gen. i. 31. where illustrated in creation as such. As such *God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good*: in all things, man included, there was the happiness that responded to His beneficent design in the original creation.

Existence
of Evil.

2. Here we might pause, as we are treating of the Divine perfections related to the created universe. But the tremendous difficulty arises that evil exists. The goodness of God is the attribute which this fact most directly confronts: not His love, which does not emerge in its glory from the ground of His loving-kindness until sin already exists; not His holiness, which likewise implies the existence of what He for ever rejects; not His wisdom, which has its grandest illustration in its making evil subservient to His designs. But it is for ever argued that a Creator of unbounded benevolence and power must, or might, or ought to have prevented the origination of evil. There are only two possible solutions of this profound difficulty. Either the desperate expedient must be adopted of renouncing a Supreme God altogether: a solution this which is really no solution, for atheism solves nothing but dissolves all. Or, accepting the testimony of God Himself, we must bow down before an unfathomable mystery, and seek our refuge in the harmony of the Divine attributes. On this subject more will be said in the next department of the perfections of God, now waiting to be revealed; as also when the doctrine of Sin comes formally before us.

Com-
promises.

3. Meanwhile, it may be well to consider briefly some compromises or palliatives which are current, and, after considering their strength and weakness, make a few closing reflections.

Evil not
good
Disguised.

(1.) So far as concerns our present subject, it is enough to impress the following considerations. First, we must be bold to reject every theory that makes evil and its development a form of the manifestation of Divine goodness: to that goodness evil is an unsearchable mystery of opposition. It might seem impossible that such a notion should be entertained: it has not only been entertained, but has been defended by very plausible arguments. Some have gone so far as to deny the objective reality of evil, and even of sin the cause of it. They make it the necessary form of limited nature: which, created by Divine power guided by benevolence, is under a law of development through sin and guilt and

evil to a predestined perfection that will leave all stages of wandering behind, swallowed up in the eternal realisation of the Divine good pleasure. The final end of the creation being the happiness of being, we are bound to believe—they tell us—that a Perfect Creator has so ordered it that what we call sin and misery should subserve in this best possible universe the purposes of His goodness more fully than a world without misery could have done. But the sufficient answer to all this is—for those at least who hold the Bible in their hands—that sin is the abominable thing that God hateth. It cannot be a designed and appointed element in the display of His goodness. Moreover, supposing it granted that for those who are ultimately delivered from sin the process will result in greater happiness than if it had not existed, this is no argument for the unsaved portion of the race.

(2.) Nor does it much help us when Predestinarian divines, abhorring this method of vindication, set up another very much like that which they condemn. They tell us that the Divine glory is the only end of creation, and NOT the happiness of the creature: instead of saying, as they ought, the Divine glory IN the happiness of the creature. They affirm, consistently, that sin is permitted in order that the justice of God might be made known in its punishment, and His grace in its pardon and removal. But we venture boldly to affirm by anticipation that both the justice and the grace of the Eternal are alike, so to speak, sublapsarian in their relation to sin. These attributes were not to be illustrated by the permission of evil; but, evil being permitted, are illustrated in contending with it. When we all say alike EVIL BEING PERMITTED, we must alike confess that an absolute solution is not by the finite creature to be found. But we cannot agree to relieve the difficulty by regarding sin as either permitted or ordained to glorify God. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that there is something inherently selfish in this argument, in whatever form put. It leaves out of view the inferior races of the creature, and all their innumerable calamities: calamities suffered also on account of the sin of man.

Evil for
the Divine
glory.

(3.) Meanwhile, we must submit to the clear and tranquil teaching of Scripture that the Divine benevolence is in all its manifestations controlling the evil of sin: this is the law of all His

Evil con-
trolled.

dispensations. Not indeed that He purposes to abolish it for ever; not that He has so controlled it in other parts of the universe as to save the fallen spirits from it. We have only to do with our own province of the created universe; and for ourselves we know that the lovingkindness of God is still over all His works. *He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good:* both His natural sun, as the symbol of His universal benevolence, and His spiritual Sun, the Friend of publicans and sinners. The history of this world is the history of unwearied benevolence for ever bringing good out of evil. However perilous it may be to speak of the ultimate happiness of the universe being heightened by the remembrance of the evil through which it has been reached, it is safe to say that the sin of man has given scope for the display of the Divine lovingkindness in forms and in resources which otherwise would never have been known. It is the glory of faith to believe that, in spite of the woful results of the Fall, *the goodness of God endureth continually.*

Matt. v
45.

Ps. lii. 1.

OBSERVATIONS.

Observations.

The attributes thus summarily exhibited are here regarded as intermediate between the first series, which belong to God regarded as Alone or without the creature, and a third order, to which we shall presently proceed. A few remarks will be appropriate at this point upon their relation to both.

Related to the Creature.

Omni-Attributes.

1. They must be understood to bring the absolute perfections of the Eternal Being into relation with the universe, and, in fact, to derive their character and name from that relation. Three illustrate this by the composition of the terms that define them: they are the OMNI-attributes, and imply the existence of all things to which they refer. The omniscience and omnipresence of the Deity especially have no meaning on any other supposition. But we must be careful not to assume that every absolute attribute has its creaturely form. The Divine all-sufficiency becomes omnipotence in the universe; but the infinity and eternity of God have no attributes of finite and temporal to correspond with them. On the other hand, when we speak of the lovingkindness and wisdom of the Creator, we cannot point to any absolute per-