

fection on which these are founded, unless indeed we base them upon the perfection of the Divine Being generally.

2. Those attributes make prominent the personality of the Supreme: not indeed that the personality of God is in any sense originated by His relation to creatures whom He calls into a quasi-independent existence. There is no sound philosophical reason why the Eternal Spirit, contemplated before and apart from the creaturely universe, should not be a Person. With such a Being, however, we never have had, and never can have, to do in the nature of things. But every one of the attributes which we ascribe to the Creator, Director, and End of the universe belongs to a Person of Whose personality we may think as we think of our own limited and imperfect selves: saving, of course, the difference between a finite and an infinite subject.

Person-
ality.

3. It may seem arbitrary to separate this order of Divine attributes from a third having relation to moral beings. The distinction is not perhaps so clear as that between the former orders: still it serves an important purpose. With those which we have just considered the enumeration would cease were there no law of probationary trial, and no fall among the facts of the universe. Had evil not entered into the creation here the display of the Divine attributes would have closed. Wisdom and goodness would have provided for the eternal blessedness of all the intelligent worshippers of God. But the moral government of the Lord of all gives a new aspect, and in some respects a new name, with an application most affectingly enlarged, to these attributes. Our study must now be conducted in the light of redemption.

Relation
to Moral
Attri-
butes.

ATTRIBUTES RELATED TO MORAL GOVERNMENT.

Moral At-
tributes.

There are some attributes, hitherto unmentioned, which belong to the Divine Being as He is the Moral Governor of intelligent creatures. These are revealed especially in connection with the economy of redemption, and derive their names and characteristics mainly from that connection: though they are displayed in the relations of God to His probationary creatures universally, they must

be viewed by us especially in the light of the mediation of Christ, and in their aspect towards mankind. All the perfections of which we speak may be said to hang upon two, Holiness and Love, the mutual relations, harmony and unity of which are bound up with the clear apprehension of the mystery of the Gospel. These supreme central attributes stand at the head, respectively, of many others which spring from them, or may be regarded as pertaining to the same family. Holiness is the name which defines the essential perfection of God as opposed to all that is not in harmony with it, and therefore connotes the actuality or the possibility of sin. Its first representative in the moral government of God is Justice, which, as Righteousness, enters distinctively into the redeeming economy of that government and gives it one of its names. This is itself represented and supported by the attributes of Truth and Fidelity. The essential Love of God, by virtue of which He communicates Himself to His creature, capable of blessedness in union with Him, is most perfectly displayed in the revelation of Jesus. It is represented by Grace, as the favour which rests upon the undeserving; and this in the varieties of its display gives many attributes to the Triune God of redemption, such as Compassion, Longsuffering, and Mercy.

**Now First
a Moral
Region**

THE MORAL ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

In the two former series of perfections we have had no reason to consider their relation to moral goodness: whatever has been introduced as bearing that aspect has entered only by anticipation. But now we are altogether in a moral region: every attribute has reference to the assertion and maintenance of ethical goodness. We find that the Supreme assumes the glory of all moral excellence; that He ascribes to Himself the absolute perfection of every quality that He requires in us. We find, moreover, that

the Lord of all appears before us in His word as often in His moral attributes, perhaps oftener, than in His absolute perfections. Are we to regard all this as unreality, and suppose that the God of our life is giving us an imaginary picture of Himself? We know that He sometimes speaks as if He had our bodily organisation; and sometimes as if He were the subject of passions and affections of which we know Him to be incapable. May it be that the entire moral presentation of the Deity from beginning to end bears the same anthropopathic character? Does some unknown Being educate mankind according to certain principles which He has made binding; and, in order to carry on the process, teach by example as well as by precept? by an example, however, altogether fictitious? This question has been discussed already in the notion of God possible to man; but a few observations may be made here on its relation to this class of attributes.

1. Every objection to the ascription to God of a moral character rests upon that false and unreal idea of the Absolute which saps the foundations of all theology. Carried out to its legitimate conclusion this would rob the Deity of every attribute, and reduce or elevate Him or It to an abstraction incapable of definition: the very term definition, or distinguishing from what it is not, being treason to the majesty of the unconditioned Entity. But, however inexorable may seem the logic that establishes such a notion of the Divine, it vanishes at the touch of common sense: at any rate, before the common sense of the man who listens to conscience within his heart, and has the Bible in his hand, and believes in the incarnation of the Son of God. With Atheists, Antitheists, and Pantheists we have not here to do: to them all and alike the attributes of God are nonentity. But it is necessary to warn believers in revelation against the mischief of refining away the reality in God Himself of those eternal qualities of right which His nature and His will unite to make binding on every creature. If God is manifest in the flesh, then He brought with Him those principles of holiness which are the glory of His human manifestation: He did not create the eternal principles that underlie morality, nor learn the first elements of morals from His creature.

2. It may be argued that all morals suppose a free submission to an external authority or law, with the possibility of doing

The
Absolute
and
Morality.

God not
Respon-
sible.

wrong. This is perfectly true of the ethical relations of probationary creatures. It is not true in the abstract: it is not true of God. The Supreme Governor of the universe is a moral being, but He is not responsible to any behind Himself. He is the foundation of all law, Himself its eternal embodiment. Nor can it be established that morality implies the possibility of evil. We are accustomed to such a thought, being ourselves what we are; but a little consideration will show that perfect liberty and perfect necessity may be and are one in the moral character of God. Necessity has two meanings: it may be compulsion from without; and it may be compulsion from within, which is hardly to be distinguished from the absolute certainty of an immutable principle. This is the highest necessity of the highest liberty in God. This also was the character of the moral development of the Son of God incarnate, Who descended to the region of our human morals with the spontaneous obedience of a will that was incapable of sin: sinless, as born in the flesh by miraculous generation; impeccable, because He was the Son of God.

Passions
and
Emotions
in God.

3. But the fundamental and more obvious difficulty here is to understand how the Immutable God can be capable of impressions from without, which the idea of passions and emotions requires. Part of this difficulty is obviated by remembering that after all much of the Biblical language on this subject is anthropopathic, an accommodation to human infirmity. Thus the unchangeable God represents Himself as hoping and fearing, uttering and suspending His wrath, vacillating in suspense, and repenting of His purposes. It is not difficult to understand all this. *Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem!* is the expression of a holy wrath that suspends its execution. *Will thou not be made clean?* is the offer of mercy in consistency with that holy wrath, the intervention of a Redeemer being supposed. *When shall it once be?* is the language of a seeming suspense between hope and fear. The Psalmist says: *Who is a Rock save our God? As for God His way is perfect.* He is unchangeable in His perfection. But he also says: *With the merciful Thou wilt shew Thyself merciful; with an upright man Thou wilt shew Thyself upright; with the pure Thou wilt shew Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt shew Thyself froward.* As it were all things to all men; but we must not misunderstand the word

Jer. xiii.
27.

Ps. xviii.
31, 30,
25, 26.

shew Thyself. As to the so frequent repentance of God, Samuel the prophet gives us a typical example. He also says: *The Strength, or the Rock, of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man that He should repent.* But he afterwards, using the same words, says: *And the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel.* But we must be careful not to carry this explanation too far. There is a real, and not merely a conventional, difference between the attributes of the absolute Godhead and the attributes created, or the manifestation of which is created, by the creation itself and with it. We cannot understand this; nor can we understand the Incarnation. We cannot fathom the mystery that the *God of eternity*, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם, inhabits time also, and waits on its processes as *the God of patience*; nor can we fathom the mystery that the impassible God should mourn and rejoice, and be angry. It is a relief to us to see that in His Son incarnate God does tabernacle with us, and rejoice with us who rejoice, and weep with us who weep. The Old-Testament anthropopathy may be an anticipation of the New-Testament reality. Or—and perhaps it is better to say this—the New-Testament exhibition of a God clothed with human morality, and of like sinless passions with ourselves, may be only the manifestation unto perfection of a mystery that was before unmanifested.

1 Sam. 15
29, 36.

Gen. xxi.
33.
Rom. xv.
5.

HOLINESS AND LOVE THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTES.

Holiness
and Love

The manifestation of God in His moral government has in every age made prominent two classes of attributes which have for their root and principle respectively the holiness and the love of the Supreme: His holiness, which separates Him from us, and His love, which nevertheless communicates itself to the sinner. The Nevertheless here points to the most essential and profound mystery of the Atonement.

1. Throughout the Old Testament we mark the ascendancy of these two perfections in their mysterious, and as yet not fully explained, union and harmony. The beginning of revelation displays the righteous anger of God against sin, and His gracious dealings with the sinner; but it was not until the Jehovah of the covenant-people laid the foundations of the Theocracy, the formal

Old Testa-
ment.