

mation of both, is the household and family of God, where He dwells as a Father in the midst of His adopted and regenerate children, united to Him in His Son the *Firstborn among many brethren*. There His love supremely reigns. It reigns, indeed, in the court and the temple; but here it supremely reigns, glorified in the face of the Incarnate, and from it shining upon all His children. The Christian system becomes now a family discipline: the sons of God are imitators of Christ, and keep the commandments as children obeying their Father's voice in love. Here we may reverently say is the perfection of the Christian economy as a display of the perfections of God in Christ. The Atonement—an expiation in the temple, and a satisfaction in the court—is the reconciliation: the reconciliation of the Father and His prodigals in the Son incarnate. Through this reconciliation, and the indwelling of the Spirit of the Son, believers are restored to the image of Him Who is the Image of the Father: *changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord*, and thus reaching the goal of their destiny, whom He did *predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son*.

4. But, though we thus decompose and distribute the Divine attributes in redemption, they combine into one harmonious glory of grace. The three are one; and the bond of their perfectness is Love. To this subject we return in due time when the administration of redemption is our subject.

SUMMARY.

A few closing remarks may be made, both dogmatic and practical, on this inexhaustible subject.

1. The meditation and study of the Divine Attributes lies at the foundation of theology, which is by the very term the doctrine of God contemplated in Himself and in His universal relations, or in the universal relation of all things to Him. The whole superstructure of this holy science might be reared upon the several names and perfections of the Most High; and, whether formally aiming at it or not, our divinity is sound only in proportion as it is remembered. There is not a single truth of our dogmatics or ethics which might not be assigned as it were to its

R. m. viii.
29.2 Cor. iii.
18.Rom. viii.
29.

Unity.

Summary.

Founda-
tion of
Theology

natural place under the several heads of the preceding distribution. But the attempt to do this, as it would overtax in many respects our ability, so it would not on the whole conduce to our advantage as students of systematic theology. Hence we must be content to make the Divine nature and perfections part only instead of the whole. But, for this very reason, a treatment of the various attributes, more elaborate and comprehensive than that which has been attempted, is needless at the outset: just as their rays are diffused and blended throughout the Scripture, so are they, as it will be found, more or less interwoven with all the topics we shall hereafter discuss.

Importance of their Harmony.

2. As the consistent and universal exhibition of the Divine perfections in their harmony is the glory of our science, so all its confusion, and dimness, and vexation have been due to the errors of men's conception of them: the history of the heresies, major and minor, of the Christian dogma is little more than the history of the systematisation of such unworthy apprehensions of those perfections. Hence, their equal honour and perfect harmony should be the standard of our aspiration in every step that we take: abstaining from the invention of attributes that God has never given to Himself, we must evermore seek to do full justice to all and to each of those which He has revealed. The safeguard of truth is in this harmony. It is a standard to which by the help of the Scripture, nowhere more rich than on this subject, we may constantly and safely bring our views of Divine things. For instance, an attribute of Sovereignty, or Absolute Sovereignty, is sometimes assigned to the Divine Being in a peculiar meaning for which the Scriptures give no warrant. Most assuredly the Supreme is, by the evidence of this very name, high above all restraint, the uncontrolled Disposer of all events. He is the *Only Potentate*. There is a sense of course in which all things that are to take place may be traced to the Divine will, which we may reverently term absolute if we desire. Moreover, with reference to some events, and some providential arrangements, the Word of God does sometimes represent Him as pointing to His sovereign pleasure, from which there is no appeal, and into the reasons of which no mortal must seek to penetrate. But it may be denied that any such attribute as that of Sovereignty is to be found mentioned in Scripture; certainly that

1 Tim vi.
16.

it is placed, where much human theology places it, at the head of all the attributes, alone sternly ruling the whole economy of revelation. At any rate God is pleased to order His wisdom and His love, and His grace which is the expression of both, in most affecting juxtaposition with His uncontrolled and uncontrollable will: He Who is the Only Potentate, is also the *Only wise God*, and *God is love*. On the other hand, this last attribute of love itself has sometimes assigned to it an absolute sovereignty of its own which dissipates the gloom of the other system by a light not borrowed from heaven. This we have sufficiently seen. And it may be enough generally to repeat, what cannot be too profoundly pondered, that the Holy Spirit has displayed the economy of the Divine perfections in such a way as to forbid every exaggeration of any one of them, and to encourage us to harmonise the whole.

1 Tim. vi
15.
Jude 25.
1 John iv.
16.

3. Once more, the study of the Divine perfections should be conducted habitually, reverently, and most devoutly, with reference to our own edification. The benefit of this is literally incalculable and inexhaustible, if we contemplate them with a never-failing reference to our soul's good: either endeavouring to rise to them or bringing them down to ourselves. We cannot indeed reach them; they are high and they are deep. But the very contemplation of perfections which oppress the mind strengthens the mind which it oppresses. To be amazed, and confounded, and baffled by our thoughts of God is the noblest discipline of the human regenerate spirit. But, though we cannot attain to them, we may—in the right sense of the word, however—bring them down to us. What this means is best taught by Scriptural examples. Let two stand for an endless series. Mark Job's struggle and submission in the presence of the Divine Omniscience. His consolation is that, though God is inscrutable to His creature, His creature is perfectly known to Him: *Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him. But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.* And David's more tranquil and equally sublime reduction to himself of the Divine Omnipresence. Meditating upon the presence of God which fills the universe, from which nothing is or can be

Practical
Study.

Job xxiii.
8—10.

concealed, he cries: *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it.* He despairs of pursuing this track; and we all despair with him. But his meditation regards God as thinking of his own poor destiny and interests: *How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. when I awake, I am still with Thee.* And then he places the secrets of his own spirit in the light of that omniscience. He brings that awful attribute to bear upon himself. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Ps.
cxxxix.
6.
Ps.
cxxxix.
17, 18,
23, 24.

In Jesus
Christ.

4. But the way everlasting suggests a truth which every Christian theologian should remember: that the Divine perfections must be contemplated as they are manifested and made incarnate in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is the sum of Divine attributes in human nature. In Him the infinite and the finite are everlastingly one. The Incarnation is an eternal fact: in purpose before time was, in reality now and for ever. We are not called to study the absolute and immanent perfections in themselves, nor in Himself the Being Who is invested with them. We have as men no God Who is not revealed in Jesus; nor need we ever contemplate Him apart from our own nature in Christ. We shall never see and never know God save as revealed in the face of His incarnate Son. In Him we see these attributes which connect the Supreme with the creature under a most blessed and peculiar aspect; especially those of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence: the omni-attributes. In Him, reflected from His face, and reflected through His work, we see the glory of the perfections that bring the Divine into relation with human redemption from sin. *But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* It may be supposed that what is primarily meant here is our common reflection of the moral image of God exhibited in the human virtue of the Son's holiness. But we have no right to limit our view rigidly to this. One with the Son—*He that is joined unto the Lord is One Spirit*—we are, in a certain sense, in Him one with the Holy Trinity, and made partakers of the Divine nature. In the likeness of the Triune

2 Cor. iii.
18.

1 Cor. vi.
17.

2 Peter i.
4.

we were originally formed. The finest dust of the material universe contributed the body which connected us with the other orders of the Creature; but it was the Spirit of God Who gave us the higher essence on which was stamped the Divine image. In our perfection in Christ we shall be restored to the most consummate reflection of every attribute of the Creator which is possible to the creature. As to the absolute attributes, and our reflection of them, there is a mystery at present unfathomable. But as to the attributes which depend on the holiness and love of the Divine nature, we must study them not only in the volume which reveals the Supreme but in the Person and Work of the Son. In His work they have their atoning aspect; and there we study them as the ground of our redemption and hope. In His Person they have their passive and active exhibition as the perfect example of human holiness. Beholding and reflecting the glory of the Divine-human character of Christ, we study the attributes of God where alone we can study them unto perfection. No department of Scriptural Theology, as such, is so abundant as that which trains our minds to contemplate the perfections of the Supreme, and to dwell upon the works and ways of God as manifestations of His character, or of His glory. The several attributes are constantly set before us, some for our adoring wonder, and some for our imitation; and they are blended into the unity which is the glory of that Divine nature of which we may be partakers.

5. Finally, though the incarnate Son has fully revealed the Father as such, and the Triune secret of the Divine essence, He has introduced no change in the exhibition of the Divine attributes generally. There is nothing more remarkable in the Bible as a whole than the substantial unity and identity of the Being Whom it describes in a series of revelations running through thousands of years. The consistency of the Holy Scriptures in this respect is one of its most glorious characteristics, and one of its strongest credentials. There is nothing in all the religious literature of mankind—and that literature is very large—which can be brought even into comparison, much less into competition, with them. This is true of the Scriptural names of the Deity; but it is more abundantly true of the perfections in which those names are enshrined. The noblest conceptions of the Godhead

Harmony
of Scrip-
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to be found outside of the Bible are found connected with the most degrading ; nor is there one hymn, or one meditation, in all Gentile theology which gives a presentation of the Divine character either perfectly honourable to God Himself or perfectly satisfying to the soul of man. But from the beginning to the end of the revelation which we accept as Divine there is not one discordant note ; the Being Whom it presents may not be at all points what human fear or hope could in its diversified moods desire ; but He is ever the Same, a Being in whose presence unholiness is rebuked and all goodness or tendency to goodness is encouraged and quickened into life. From that almost the first announcement to a personal worshipper, *I am the Almighty God ; walk before Me and be thou perfect*, through all the annals of Scripture, there is the same God Whose character is the standard of perfection, Whose almightiness or all-sufficiency is the source of strength, and Whose manifested Presence is the light and joy of life. Everywhere we find the great quaternion of names which combine His essence and His attributes. God is JEHOVAH, the absolute Being ; He is SPIRIT, the personal object of worship ; He is LIGHT, repelling all impurity ; He is LOVE, diffusing His goodness as grace for ever.

Gen. xvii.
1.

Ex. vi. 3.
Jno. iv. 24.
1 Jno. i. 5.
1 John iv.
8.