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OUR TALKS ABOUT THE TRINITY

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JAMES MORRIS WHITON, PH.D.

"

"God is a circle, whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere."

NEW YORK

THOMAS WHITTAKER

2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE

1892

THE  
CARTON PRESS  
171, 173  
MACDOUGAL STREET  
NEW YORK

BT III  
W62

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The Carton Press  
171, 173 Macdougall Street, New York

124310

### AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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THESE pages have been written for thoughtful laymen. And yet it may be enough to deter such readers, that the subject presented is the Trinity. Cause enough has often been given for regarding this subject as too enigmatical, and too unrelated to daily uses, to attract the attention of busy men unschooled in theological mysteries. Until the contrary can be demonstrated by presenting it in a different light, any attempt to secure a keener interest in it among ordinary thinkers must rest under the unfavorable presumption which has been admitted. To such a demonstration it is hoped these pages may contribute something. To facilitate the purpose in view, and to relieve the inherent difficulties of the subject-matter, the somewhat unusual form of dialogue has been adopted,

*AUTHOR'S NOTE.*

in which more or less of many conversations is recorded.

Sooner or later it must be, that the Church will reap rich harvests of spiritual thought and life from this now weed-grown field, so long left fallow. It cannot be that this fundamental and all comprehending truth of Christianity will always be left in the cloud which barren scholastic controversy has raised about it.

NEW YORK, May 10, 1892.

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I.

*SOME MISAPPREHENSIONS CLEARED*

"In vain I turned in weary quest  
Old pages where (God give them rest)  
The poor creed-mongers dreamed and guessed."

WHITTIER.

## I.

### *SOME MISAPPREHENSIONS CLEARED.*

WE had a mild excitement at our church to-day, remarked our neighbor who dropped in to talk on a Sunday evening.

Mild excitement, said I, is a thing that most church-goers are grateful for. It keeps them awake.

In this case it promises to keep us awake for a few days at least, on a subject not usually exciting, in fact, the Trinity.

Ah, tell us how it happened.

Why, right in the middle of the morning sermon, Madam Sandy, our old minister's widow, who seems to have taken a contract to see that his opinions are not departed from, sniffed heresy in the air, and marked her protest against it by straight-way stalking out of church.

That was rather exciting. But are you sure it

was not a sudden faintness perhaps, or nausea, that took her out?

Quite unlikely. I asked Dr. Wise, her family physician, why he didn't follow her out to offer assistance. He said he took a good look at her face as she walked by his pew, and saw that it was a case of fire, not of faintness.

Pray what had your minister said that fired her up?

Well, as I intimated, his discourse touched on the Trinity. Dr. Sandy used to be very rigid on that. He used to represent it as a doctrine indispensable to salvation, and all Unitarians as left to the uncovenanted mercies of God. Now, right in the teeth of that, our minister quoted, with approval, a remark by the church-historian, Neander, to the effect that the Trinity was not a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. Madam waited not to hear more, but fled the place at once.

Well, that was rather an undesirable show of ancient manners. It used to be more common to testify dissent in that fashion than it is now.

Yes, and the old-time come-outer liked to bang his pew door after him by way of emphasis. It was rather a testy way of bearing testimony. I think it requires more grace to sit decorously quiet under a speech that you dislike,

I remember a case where it would have been far better so to do. I was once present where an amateur theologian made himself rather ridiculous by a rash exit. The sermon was making him quite uneasy, but he chose an unfortunate moment to break away. The preacher had begun to quote from the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*, when, just as he repeated the words, "Out! Out! damnéd spot!" the malcontent arose and left.

That was a comical coincidence. But now I should like to know what you think of the statement that produced this morning's explosion, namely, that the Trinity is not a fundamental doctrine of Christianity.

Why, it is certainly true in the sense in which Neander said it. He was speaking of the speculative, -metaphysical form which the doctrine has assumed in theology. But he speaks very differently of the devotional and practical form in which the Scriptures present it, as in the baptismal formula, and in the apostolic benediction. In regard to this, he says: "We recognize therein the essential contents of Christianity summed up in brief." \*

Well, I suppose it is essential not only to sum up in brief, but also to unfold and define these con-

\* *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, 12th edition, p. 572, 573.

tents, so as to understand just what the words mean. I mean, of course, essential for thinking men. But this is just where one quickly gets into water too deep for him. At least, I do. The simplest definition that I have found is in our Westminster Catechism : " There are Three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." But even this takes me a step beyond the limit between knowledge and mystery, and leaves me where it is impossible to form any clear conception of the fact.

I suppose that this is the common experience. The fact that it is so common ought to suggest the question, whether so general a failure may not be due to some following of a mistaken line of thought into a sort of blind alley, a theological *cul de sac*. I doubt whether there is such a thing as a right line of rational thought which ends in intellectual confusion.

You speak as if you think there might be a way out of the labyrinth.

I think there must be. The Holy Scripture asserts on one hand the unity of God, and on the other hand ascribes Divinity alike to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. There must be some line

of thought in which the attempt we are bound to make to harmonize these two classes of statements will not end in impenetrable mystery, but in a clear vision of the truth.

Well, I cannot say this is incredible, but after so many centuries of effort by the greatest intellects, it seems improbable.

I cannot think it so. "To seek the head of the Nile" was to the ancient world a proverb for a hopeless quest. But the Nile has in our day yielded up its secret. You must remember that modern learning has given us resources for theological exploration far beyond what the ancients, or even our grandfathers, possessed. Besides, even in this Trinitarian problem, we have a historical precedent for warranting some hopefulness in a fresh attack upon it. Never were there keener or stronger thinkers than the Greek theologians of the fourth century, who first formulated Trinitarian thought in the creed of Nicæa. And yet the Latins of the ninth century gave an extension to the Trinitarianism of the fourth century which has been accepted by all the Western churches. Why is it unlikely that the nineteenth century may also give the old line a new extension?

Well, it would have to be something new to be of much interest to me. I have become weary of



preachers threshing the old straw in vain attempts to define the indefinable and explain the inexplicable. I confess I was rather glad to hear our minister quote so orthodox an authority as Neander for my idea that the Trinity is no fundamental part of Christian doctrine. I am afraid that I am not much of a Trinitarian, though I am a member of Trinity Church. I have about given it up in my own mind as a piece of old time speculation of not much practical value nowadays.

I regret that so great a name as Neander should seem to endorse that unbalanced statement, which he himself carefully restricted to the metaphysical form of the doctrine. Did not your minister go on to tell you so?

I suppose he did. He went on with Neander's views, but Madam Sandy's performance so broke me up that my attention let go.

That was too bad. These rash zealots for what they call orthodoxy always mar matters more than they mend them. Why, man, Neander goes on to say, as your minister must have added, that the Trinity belongs to the "proper and fundamental essence of Christianity." That is precisely my thought about it. I am as far as can be from your notion, that it is an antiquated, profitless bit of speculative theology. To me it is just the oppo-

site—the most comprehensive, vital, and invigorating of all Christian truths, a very truth of truths, in touch with Christian thought, feeling, and action, at every point of the whole circle of life. If you fancy you are not much of a Trinitarian, I think I can show you that you are on the wrong track. Let me be your switchman to another line of thought, and I dare say you will come to a very different conclusion.

Well, you seem so sanguine that perhaps I ought to let you try. At least I shall be interested to know how it is that you have got on to your mountain-top of solid rock and unclouded vision, while I have got into such a foggy swamp. I think I shall rather enjoy an hour in comparing notes. You are the first man who has piqued me with a fresh interest in re-opening the subject.

Will you tell me what made you give it up as closed?

Why, I went with it one day to our old minister, Dr. Sandy, who used to preach on it now and then. “How,” said I, “can three Persons be one God?” He replied that the Three were indeed persons, as distinct from each other as Peter, James, and John, but that they were, notwithstanding, one in the unity of a common divine nature, as Peter, James, and John are one in the

unity of a common human nature. Now, to my mind, that means three Gods as really as it means three men.

I do not wonder at your rejecting such a notion, though I might wonder that a minister holding such a grotesque fancy can hold his place in a church so scrupulous for orthodoxy as your Presbyterians are. It only illustrates what Dr. Bushnell said long ago, that there was a so-called orthodoxy which was "a mere tritheistic compost," and more careful to insist on the Threeness than to guard the Unity of God. But do not mistake such a caricature for the reality. Let me relate my anecdote in turn. Some years ago a friend of mine was put out of Presbyterian fellowship for a theological error. He concentrated the entire Deity in the One Person of Christ, and regarded the tenet of the Three Persons as an empty speculation. Soon after he was disfellowshipped he happened to meet Dr. Bellows, the minister of All Souls Unitarian Church, in New York, who greeted him thus: "Ah, Mr. X., I am very sorry to hear that you no longer believe in the Trinity. But I want to tell you that I do believe in the Trinity."

That is a good story, but what did he, a Unitarian, mean?

Not that he believed in the Trinity as understood

by Mr. X's prosecutors, but merely that he accepted the Biblical Trinity as he understood it. So do very many Unitarians. They divide from us in their philosophy rather than in their faith. You will hear them joining in that ancient chant to the Trinity which we call the *Te Deum*; or you will hear them use the Trinitarian apostolic benediction in public worship: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all.*

That is all very well. Nevertheless, Dr. Bellows would not have consented to be classed as a Trinitarian, because that term is monopolized by men of a different way of thinking, and that is just my difficulty.

Why is it any more of a difficulty in your case than in mine? The Trinity, as I understand it, is the fundamental article of my faith, yet I utterly dissent from the Trinitarian notions of your Dr. Sandy. Pray, do you imagine that if you should get at the opinions of the first dozen Trinitarian ministers you might converse with, you would find them identical? Nay, you would find them vary in every case. Let me ask if you have not observed that, while "Trinity Church" is a very common name, a Trinity sermon is a very rare thing.

I have, indeed, heard very few such, and never one that did not perplex and weary me.

The reason is, that the subject perplexes the sermonizers also. It is a wide-spread feeling among them that the Trinity is better adapted to the theological lecture room than to the pulpit. They are very shy of it. The Episcopal Church, indeed, has its "Trinity Sunday," but with reference to that an Oxford man once said to me, "We have dropped the Trinity in England, except once a year." In my view it is a sad plight to be in, but it is the natural recoil from the blind alley where speculation on an impracticable line has proven that there is no way out. Meanwhile, as you might expect, Trinitarian opinion is in a very chaotic state. The average preacher clings to the biblical formula, beyond which he dimly apprehends a tri-personal mystery which he names the Trinity, but regards as inexplicable. Others go on to explain and define, and their opinions will vary all along the line from Tritheism to Sabellianism—that is, from three Gods, who somehow are One, to three temporary agencies of One God, who, for the purpose of our redemption, acts as both Father and Son and Spirit. You may be sure, then, that if you think the name of Trinitarian would bind you to any one clear-cut and universally

received idea of the Trinity, you have misconceived the facts.

How that can be I cannot understand. The Nicene Creed was framed for the express purpose of shutting out Unitarians, who did not object to the Apostles' Creed. If so, there is at least one clear-cut, comprehensive formula, which all varieties of Trinitarians unite in, and by which they are distinguished from Unitarians.

It will still more surprise you to hear that it is not quite so. On the contrary, one of my friends, a leader among Unitarians, has told me that he prefers the Nicene Creed to the Apostles' Creed. Nor have I the least doubt, either of his sincerity or of his dissent from what is popularly called Trinitarianism. Let me repeat the Nicene statements concerning Christ which my Unitarian friend accepts :

“One Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

He repeated these very phrases to me, and added, “I believe this with all my heart.”

Well, that is passing strange. How can any Unitarian believe that? Do you understand it?

I think I do, for I have often reflected on it as a proof of the inadequacy of fixed theological formulas to meet the shifting exigencies of advancing thought. The reason that a Unitarian can accept such statements now, though they were framed expressly to exclude the old-time Unitarians, is that the Nicene ideas concerning human nature as being different in kind from the divine nature, have begun to change, and both Trinitarians and Unitarians are coming to agree in regarding human nature as essentially one with the divine. It is in the line of this changed view of human nature that I believe we are to find whatever solution of the Trinitarian problem is to be hoped for.

Please explain. This is something really new to me.

Well, then, to be as brief as clearness permits, Athanasius, who was the leader of the Trinitarian party in the fourth century, and by whose influence the Nicene formulas were shaped, held that there is an essential difference of nature between man and God. He says: "We were fashioned out of the earth. He [the Son of God] is by nature and substance Word and true God . . . The Word has real and true identity of nature with the Father, but to us it is given to imitate it. . . . We by imitation become virtuous and sons."

Such was the dominant conception of human nature when the Nicene formula put forth, as the the test of orthodox Trinitarianism, its famous word, *homoousios*, which affirms "the same substance" to belong to God and to Christ, as the Father and the Son. On that one word Trinitarians and Unitarians parted irreconcilably.

But is it a fact that that word no longer parts them?

It is. Some years since, Dr. F. H. Hedge, in a printed essay, declared the adoption of that test word, *homoousios*, by the Council of Nicæa to have been a grand victory of Christian truth. Not long since, in a conversation on the Trinity, I quoted Dr. Hedge's remark to an English theologian. He could not understand it at all, and asked if Dr. Hedge was speaking in a Pickwickian sense.

No wonder he asked you that. It is all dark to me.

But it will not be, if you reflect on this: That the core of humanity is its moral and spiritual nature. Though man, as he appears on earth, is composed of "spirit, soul, and body" (according to Paul's account), the loss of the earthly body, at death, leaves us no less human than before. This shows that the flesh is a mere temporary accident, as logicians say, of our humanity, while the spirit



is its permanent essence. Now in this spiritual core of human nature Christ was certainly of the same nature as we, loving, praying, tempted, suffering, rejoicing, as a man among men. But moral and spiritual nature, whether divine or human, must be of one and the same kind, however varying in development. To deny this is to unsettle the very foundations of conscience. Were spiritual nature of different kinds, then goodness, truth, justice and all spiritual qualities might be different in man and God, and Jesus' saying, "*Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect,*" would have no practical value as a reliable rule of life.

Ah, I think I begin to understand. Dr. Hedge meant that in adopting the *homoousios* the men of Nicæa builded better than they knew.

Of course. He did not mean to extol their decision, with the limitations they gave it, as a finality, but he accepted it as a basis for subsequent thought to proceed upon. They were very far from seeing what Dr. Hedge saw, and what Dr. Dale has lately said: "The Christian doctrine of man is implicated in the Christian doctrine of God, or to speak more exactly, in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; and the Christian doctrine of man determines the Christian theory of morals and the Christian theory of society."\* Concentrating their thought on the

\* "Fellowship with Christ," p. 158.

nature of Christ solely as related to God, and overlooking its relation to man, they took no account of the fact that it was a nature equally one with humanity as with Deity. They failed to see that their favorite *homousios* could not be applicable to Christ apart from the human race from which he sprang, and whose spiritual head he is. But now what they asserted for Christ alone Christian thought goes logically forward to assert also for mankind, that the race is spiritually "of one substance with the Father."

I grant you this was a great gain for humanity, though they failed to see it as we do. In establishing their position, of course, they established everything that logically follows from it, however long it might be before the logical conclusion came. No doubt it was, as Dr. Hedge says, a great victory for truth.

Great, indeed, in view of its practical consequences for morality and religion. Only in this essential unity of all spiritual nature, whether divine or human, is there, as I was just now saying, any solid certainty for conscience that righteousness is the same in man and in God, or any practicable and permanent moral rule for the endeavor to think God's thoughts and to imitate God's ways. Just this I take to be the import of

Dr. Dale's pregnant remark, that our doctrine of man, with our theories of morals and of society, is involved in our conception of the Trinity. And I now recall another remark of his in conversation, that "the truth of the Trinity is that from which we are to expect the most for the quickening and deepening of Christian life."

You have given me an idea of the matter quite unlike anything I have conceived before. Indeed, I had fallen in with popular notions that I now begin to suspect as both narrow and superficial. It is too large a subject for us to finish in one interview, and I would like to think over what you have said. But you have given me the hope that there is a way out of the long controversy into a common understanding. On the one hand, it seems that Trinitarians vary among themselves, with no clear-cut understanding of the Three Persons. On the other, some Unitarians, at least, assent—of course with their own interpretation of the words—to the Nicene phrases that have till now been the very shibboleths of Trinitarians. This being so, it begins to look as if both parties might come together in a common view of the subject which will contain all of truth that they have separately contended for.

You are not the only one who thinks so. I was talking one day with a circle of devout Unitarians,

in a New England church, who expressed this very hope. Not long since a prominent Trinitarian minister in New England, who stands about midway between conservatives and liberals, said to me that the Unitarian schism, which took place about a century ago, could not have arisen, had the conditions of Christian thought been what they are to-day. Then there is Dr. Martineau, the leading English Unitarian. Have you heard of his essay, "A Way out of the Trinitarian Controversy?"

I have not. What does he say?

Comparatively few in this country seem to have read it. I am surprised that it has received so little attention among our theologians and religious journalists. It is one of the most luminous and interesting contributions to the discussion of our subject. In brief, his position is that Trinitarians and Unitarians have each been so snared in an illusion of words, that they have been blind to the fact that the Divine object of the faith of each is really one and the same, though differently named by each. The Unitarian worships the Father, the Trinitarian, the Son. "But," says Dr. Martineau, "He who is the Son in the one creed is the Father in the other, and the two [creeds] are agreed, not indeed by any means throughout, but in that which constitutes the pith and kernel of both faiths."

Why, that is novel enough, and almost paradoxical. How does he make all that appear?

More easily than you think. The Father, says { Dr. Martineau, is "God in his primeval essence;" the Son is "God speaking out in phenomena and fact." In other words, the Father is Deity self-existent, absolute, unconditioned, the inscrutable source of all that is, the fathomless Mystery of original and eternal being, unknowable except as manifested in the things, events, and beings, that proceed from him. But God as thus manifested is not the Father who begets, but the Son who is begotten of Him. With this thought Dr. Martineau thus addresses his Unitarian friends: "Everything that you can say to convey a just conception of your God—that he spread the heavens, that he guided Israel, that he dwelt in the Human Christ . . . you will discover registered among the characters of the Son. It is in him therefore, among the objects of your church-neighbor's faith, that your belief is placed; . . . you omit the first Person, and begin with the second. . . . The Father . . . is really absent from the Unitarian creed."

But is not Dr. Martineau here putting a broader meaning to the term "Son" than will be generally allowed?

Very likely, yet not broader than the Scriptures allow, which regard all men as in the relation of sonship to God. "*We are his offspring*," said Paul to a pagan audience, quoting the words from a pagan poet. Nor is it any broader than reason requires. In the dominant evolutionary conception of science, all life is essentially one, and all life, being derived from God, is related to him as the filial to the paternal life. Yet, while this is so, we properly reserve the appellation of *the Son* to Christ, as the highest revelation of this filial life of the world, which is all from God.

Well, you certainly are not threshing over any of the old straw. You have begun to give me fresh ideas on a subject where I thought there were none. Talk about the Trinity always seemed to me far away, and dry, and interesting only to folks that fancy hair-splitting on nice distinctions, appreciable only by doctors of divinity. But somehow it begins to look as if it might be closely connected with human life and the world we live in.

So it is, indeed. I think you will, in time, be profoundly convinced that the Trinity is not a truth for philosophers, any more than for all thoughtful men, and that it is in Christianity the very truth of truths, the richest of all in comfort

and inspiration for heart and mind. If it has not been such hitherto, it is because of the crudeness of popular conceptions. It is a fact, as Dr. Martineau says, that "many a disciple, unschooled in the fine distinctions of a Greek theology, thinks of the Father chiefly as the God prior to the plan of the Incarnation, of the Son as the historical figure, of the Holy Ghost as the agent sent on the day of Pentecost, to take the place of the ascended Christ. He fancies these acting each on the other as outside beings, and conducting a divine drama among themselves." Undoubtedly this is the notion which the Trinitarian cannot rationally explain, and which the Unitarian cannot rationally accept.

Yes, and that is just the notion which I have had, and which has made me say that I was not much of a Trinitarian. But I will not say that now. Not that the way is yet quite clear to me, but I see a likelihood of its becoming clear whenever we can talk it through.

I do not doubt that. I hope to make it not only as clear in your thought as it is in mine, but also as helpful to your religious life and spiritual needs as it has been to me. It is a deplorable mistake to fancy the Trinity to be a riddle which no one can solve, and, even if one could solve it,

a thing of no practical benefit, like the northwest passage to Asia, through the ice of the polar circle, hard to find, and useless when found. Such a Trinity there is, but it is the Trinity of scholastic metaphysicians. With their dry and mouldy bread we will have nothing to do. In place of that we shall come to a truth which gives sacredness to life, enthusiasm to philanthropy, patience and hope to mortal struggles, and glory to the world in which the Son and the Spirit show us the Presence and Power of the Father.

I shall wait with eagerness for what you promise me on this new line of thought.

Pardon me, if I correct you. If it were wholly a new line of thought, I should distrust it. It is rather, as I have already suggested, an extension of an old line. As I intimated, when speaking of the *homoousios*, we are logically obliged to carry its application further than was done at Nicæa, and to claim for the race of man that oneness of spiritual nature with God which was there claimed only for the great "Son of man." Thus extending the Nicene line of thought, we shall find ourselves conducted by that larger conception of God, which the Scriptures in the light of evolutionary science reveal, to a conception of the Trinity, alike clear to reason, conformable to Scripture, precious to



faith, and touching all the nerves of life with inspiring and uplifting power. I have so proved this in my own experience, that I am always sorry when I hear a Christian man speak of the Trinity as more of a strain than a support to faith, and as an old time speculation which should be respectfully, but firmly, bowed out of our modern thought. Those who talk so seem to me like children who have not learned yet what an inheritance is theirs.

It begins to dawn on me that the new theology, of which I have heard so much, might have suggested to me that it involved a new Trinitarianism, as well as new conceptions of the Bible, and of the Atonement, and of the future state of rewards and punishments.

Yes ; those other questions, on which Christian thought has been so warmly engaged, important as they are, are really secondary to the question which they all at length refer us to, concerning the being of God, and his relation to the world. Now, as I shall hope to show you, that question finds its all inclusive answer in the truth of the Trinity, which is therefore the truth of truths. Biblical study has been freeing us from a crude understanding of the Scriptures in general, and from misinterpretation of texts in particular. The

advance of science has revealed to us the unity of all life, and the evolution of life and all things in an orderly and everlasting process, outside of which not even the unique Person of Christ can now be rationally placed. Thus we have been supplied with materials that were not available half a century ago for fresh thought as to God and his relation to the world. There must, therefore, be a fresh discussion of this ; that is to say, the Trinitarian question must be essayed again, with the fresh light that this age has found. The reasonable presumption is, that we shall find ground, not only to hold to all the truth that the ancients reached, but to reach out from that to truth that is larger and more satisfying. The hopefulness of such a prospect is, that here will appear fruitful fields beyond the desert region we have wandered in, and Christian unanimity after so much barren controversy.

I share your hope for that. It seems to me that the stubbornness of the Unitarian protest through all the centuries of reigning orthodoxy is most reasonably attributable, not to a perverse hostility to truth, but to the necessarily divisive nature of conclusions that were but partially true.

You are right there. When we get at the whole truth, we shall all be at one.



II.

*THE SON OF GOD*  
*THE CAUSE OF CONTROVERSY*  
*AND THE END OF IT*

“The Son is the Living Will of the Father.” 7

ATHANASIUS.

## II.

### *THE SON OF GOD. THE CAUSE OF CONTROVERSY AND THE END OF IT.*

How does it seem to you now, said I, when we next found ourselves free for conversation.

I have been thinking, he replied, that Dr. Martineau's view of the Father and the Son may reconcile more than the two parties he has especially in mind.

How so?

It seems to me that it opens a way out of the agnostic difficulty as well as the Unitarian. I was talking, since we parted, with a friend who is one of the best of men, and leads a life of unselfish goodness that puts many who call themselves Christians into pitiful contrast. But he thinks that all thought given to theology is wasted, because, as he says, the Infinite Being is utterly unknowable. It has occurred to me that his unknowable God corresponds with Dr. Martineau's conception of the Father as "God in his primeval

essence." Of course this is unknowable to us—an absolute mystery.

That it is and must be. What else do Christian thinkers mean when they speak of God as transcendant—that is, above and beyond the reach of thought? Yet this is the Father, the fathomless Fountain of our life, known only by what rises to the surface from the inscrutable depths. So much we freely concede to the agnostic. Jesus also concedes it. "*Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him.*"

Do you suppose that Jesus meant by this that He only, as the Son of God, makes known the Father, and that there is no revelation of the Father except through Him?

Neither the Scriptures nor the history of thought justifies so narrow an inference. Isaiah confessed, "*Doubtless Thou art our Father.*" The Greek poet whom Paul quoted to the Athenians had divined the same truth. So did the Greek philosophers, especially the Platonists and the Stoics. What Jesus did was to reveal in its fulness the truth which His forerunners among Hebrew prophets and Gentile sages had but partially glimpsed.

But did not Jesus say explicitly, "*No man cometh unto the Father but by Me?*"

Certainly, and yet we must not put a meaning on His words which would make them untrue to the facts. They point us along two lines of thought. One is, that no one comes to the full revelation of the Father except through the Christ of the Gospels. The other is, that no one has come to any revelation of the Father—such partial revelations as have been preparatory to that which He made by Christ—except through what there was of the Christ-spirit in the world before the historic appearance of Christ. What I have in mind is this: Before the historical Christ was born, the essential Christ had begun to appear, partially, of course, in a succession of more or less Christly men. It was through such men—through what there was of Christ in them—that Hebrews and heathen had begun to come to the Father; before the advent of Christ with His perfect revelation. Similar experiences doubtless take place to-day. Why, this is what we see whenever a Christian mother teaches her little one to lisp “Our Father” for the first time.

It must be so, I admit. And yet it is not the most obvious meaning of Christ’s words.

Perhaps not; and yet what seem obvious meanings are often very superficial, and therefore fallacious. When Jesus said, “*All that came before Me are thieves and robbers,*” the obvious meaning, as



one might say, was that there had been only false teaching in the world until His time. But He could not have meant that, for He was ever quoting Moses and the prophets. He meant only the false formalists, who had ruled everything for a good while before Him. So we must not be misled to put an obvious fallacy in place of a deeper truth in what He says of the Father as revealed only by the Son.

Well, then, since Jesus did not intend to say that the revelation of the Father is restricted to His historic person, what do you think is the full scope of His saying?

I do not see how it can be any thing narrower than this: The unseen can be known only by the seen which comes forth from it. The all-generating or Paternal Life, which is hidden from us, can be known only by the generated or Filial Life in which it reveals itself. The goodness and righteousness which inhabits eternity can be known only by the goodness and righteousness which issues from it in the successive births of time. God above the world is made known only by God in the world. God transcendant, the Father, is revealed by God immanent, the Son. This revealing of the Father, which is the function of the Son, did not begin with Christ, as the Scripture itself and the history of religious thought and life demonstrate, but it was

perfected by Christ. In our conception of "the Son" we must include, at least, all the more or less Christly men who lived before Christ, for in them also was the Spirit of the Son. Thus it is clear that what Christ claims He claims specially, but not exclusively, for that would be falsely.

I see it must be so. Any narrower interpretation of His words would put Him in contradiction to historical facts. And it seems quite clear, in the view you take, that we must give a wider sense to the Trinitarian term, Son, than either Trinitarians or Unitarians have thus far generally recognized.

Indeed we must. It has been formally restricted to the historical person of Christ. But in reality it must be extended to include the whole of that Eternal Manifestation by which Transcendent Deity—the unknown God of the agnostic, the hidden Father of the Trinitarian—is revealed as immanent, in all, as well as above all, indwelling in His works, in the life of man, and most fully in Jesus Christ. When He at length appears it is as *the* Son of God, pre-eminently such, but not exclusively.

That I take to be Dr. Martineau's view. The Son, also called in Scripture the Word, is, as he says, "God speaking out in phenomena and fact." But if a Unitarian will agree to that, will he find

Trinitarians disposed to go with him in giving this larger meaning to their traditional formula, "God the Son?"

Not all at once. Many have such crude conceptions of God, and of what personality is—especially the divine and perfect personality, which they generally confound with the individuality, or separateness of existence, which we see in the fragmentary personality of man—that it will be only gradually that a more spiritual theology can prevail. But already Dr. Martineau's solution has been greeted with a Trinitarian welcome. An orthodox Scotch reviewer quotes Dr. Martineau's statement, "His Word [also called Son] is as eternal as Himself," and says that "this is a 'platform' of preliminary agreement never reached before." He says that with "Eternal Sonship" as a basis for further discussion, a great advance has been made on the old Unitarianism, and a hope opened "that the breach made in the third century may be healed in our times."

Stay a moment; please make this unfamiliar phrase, "Eternal Sonship," as clear as may be.

Most willingly, though it takes us for a few moments into rather deep waters. It was in the fourth century the turning point of the Trinitarian discussions, and has come to be so again, though, as

you see, with a wider meaning than then. The contention of the Catholics against the Arians (the representative Unitarians at Nicæa) was, that the Son was eternal, and uncreated, and really Son, not merely so called. Of course they did not use "Son" in a physical sense, but in a metaphysical. But by it they meant to express symbolically two truths of the utmost practical consequence. And here we shall see what in our scientific times is constantly illustrated—that the refined researches of students connect closely with the needs of working-men. By the Eternal Sonship, which, as I have said, they unduly restricted to the pre-existent Christ, the early Trinitarians sought to meet two requirements of all seekers after God. We need to know, first, that the inscrutable Deity has not withdrawn Himself from human cognizance, and next, that it is no go-between or undivine messenger, but God Himself, who brings us knowledge of God.

These are, indeed, truths of supreme moment. But I do not at once see how the notion of Eternal Sonship carries them.

It will be quite clear to you as soon as you put it in connection with two simple propositions which you will readily grant: first, that it is the very nature of a father to have a son; next, that a son is identical in nature with his father. Ac-

cordingly, applying these correlative terms, Father and Son, to God (in a symbolical and metaphysical sense, of course), they meant by "Eternal Sonship," first, that it is of the very nature of Deity to issue forth into visible expression. Thus they secured Paul's faith, that God has never left Himself without witness. They meant, next, that this outward expression of God is not something other than God, but God Himself in a self-expression as divine as is the hidden Deity. Thus they answered Philip's cry, "*Show us the Father and it sufficeth us,*" and thus they affirmed Jesus' declaration, "*He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.*" However speculative and metaphysical you may have deemed their thought, I think the practical value of it is perfectly apparent.

Indeed it is. Not, however, unless we take away the limitation of the word "Son," which was imposed upon them by their idea of human nature as essentially undivine. Giving that term the extension which you give it, it does not leave God outside of the world and far above it, but recognizes Him as an inhabitant of it, animating it from within, pervading it throughout, with us and in us, a partaker of all human life, as well as dwelling with men in His Christ.

Yes, and that is not all. Many scientific men

have rejected Christianity because they fancy that Divine Revelation is somehow an interference with the uniform order of nature. Indeed, the mediæval style of Christian thought that still is popular has given them cause for this misunderstanding. But the early Trinitarianism was far wiser. The Eternal Sonship attests that Revelation is not an after-thought, nor an interposition, but a part of the order of things ; nay, it is the eternal order. It is of the very nature of Deity to issue forth in self-expression. Athanasius constantly illustrates this idea by his favorite comparison of the relation of the Father and the Son to that of a luminary and its rays. "Who can imagine," he says, "that the radiance of light ever was not?"

You have made the point quite clear. May we not depend upon it also in other matters, that what is truest spiritually is also truest scientifically?

I believe it to be so. There is no real conflict between Reason and Revelation. President Hopkins once made a memorable remark about this: Christianity and perfect Reason are identical. Whatever is not perfect Reason is no part of Christianity.

Well, you have thus far made it plain that what I once thought a subject of mere misty and profitless speculation, is not only clearly intelligible and

reasonable, but vitally helpful to the practical ends of spiritual life. And yet I have heard a New England minister, who supposed himself an orthodox Trinitarian, declare that the eternal generation of the Son "was eternal nonsense." You can hardly wonder at the prejudice that I was under when I first began to talk with you.

That is no wonder. What Dr. Bushnell, in reply to those who accused him of Unitarianism, called "the dilapidated and provincial orthodoxy of New England," is responsible for no small amount of skepticism, out of which thinkers better acquainted with catholic Trinitarianism are endeavoring to lead the way. I believe that ordinary Unitarianism, at present, largely supports itself on its protests against a crude and mechanical Trinitarianism which is beginning to dissolve. And I see no reason to differ with Dr. Martineau, when he says, "Let the advocates of both faiths compare them from this point of view [that is, that 'He who is the Son in the one creed, is the Father in the other'], with mind open, not to words only, but to the real thoughts they contain, and with temper sensitive to sympathy rather than to divergency, and there is hope that we may yet all come into the unity of faith, and true knowledge of the Son of God."

I am sure that all will unite with him in his hope and effort to realize it, who prize truth more than party, and believe, as every truth seeker must, that there is some truth which he has not yet attained to. But the "way out" does not yet seem to be really so short and simple as Dr. Martineau's account of it is. There is a difficulty which I feel, yet can poorly express. It comes before me in the form of a question: How could so long and bitter a controversy ever have arisen? The lines of it were first clearly drawn in the fourth century. But it was rising as far back as the close of the apostolic age. I believe it is generally admitted that in the Jewish section of the primitive church Unitarian views largely obtained. And even after the Council of Nicæa, was it not long before the Trinitarian ascendancy there won was permanently established?

Yes, the persecutions which Athanasius, as the head of the Trinitarian interest, underwent for forty years afterward are attested by the phrase that has become proverbial, "Athanasius against the world."

Very well. Now this is my question: What was the cause of this obstinate struggle? What difficulty was at the root of it? Has this root of opposition been removed? If not, then, it seems to me, we are not any nearer "the way out."



I agree with you. Let us first identify the root, and next we will see whether it has been taken away, or seems likely to be.

Well, what do you think was the cause of controversy?

It was precisely the same which now parts the ordinary Trinitarian and Unitarian—a difference about the relation of Christ to God, a difference which I have already referred to as likely to be done away with by a change of view as to the relation of man to God in a common spiritual nature. From then till now, the doctrine of the Trinity has served mainly as a pedestal for the deity of Christ. It is not far from true to say that a Trinitarian minister may hold what view he pleases as to the Trinity, provided he fully admits the deity of Christ. The interest of Trinitarians has been, and is, more in the statue than in its pedestal. Hence the wealth of phraseology with which Christ's deity is affirmed in the creed of Nicæa, and its confession of the Divine Triad, in which the Son appears as the central personage. The whole labor of Trinitarianism then was for this close identification of Christ's nature with God's. And, as Dr. Hedge tells us, we have reason to be thankful for their success in it. I think I can show you, however, that it has for modern

thought a still larger scope, but I cannot speak of that till by and by.

I have observed that the Nicene creed has comparatively little to say about the Father and the Holy Ghost.

True ; room is left there for us moderns to add something for our needs, as your remark about the agnostic difficulty suggested. But then there was less need, perhaps less power than now, for any greater explicitness on these points. The special exigency of that time was to set forth the Scriptural truth as to the nature of Christ. If the Creed gives special emphasis to that point, it seemingly follows the New Testament in so doing. What a wealth of such texts the creed-makers found, as this of Paul's, "*In him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily ;*"—and this of John's, "*The Word was in the beginning with God, and was God, and became flesh, and we beheld His glory, as of the only begotten from the Father.*" With these compare the Nicene phrases, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."

Yes, I admit that the Creed is scriptural, not scholastic ; it contains none of the stumbling blocks of the schools about the "three Persons," and the "two natures." But why, then, if both parties

were united in believing the Scriptures, should they have divided upon such a creed?

The radical difficulty was this. The Arians could not believe that infinite Deity was subjected, as in Christ, to human limitations. On the testimony of the Scriptures, they held Christ to be divine, but they held divinity to be a thing of degrees, and Christ's divinity not in the highest rank, but such only as a created being might lay claim to, *like*, but not *the same*, with God in *nature*, or *substance*—terms, by the way, nearly equivalent. The Athanasians, on the contrary, contended that when the Scripture said, "the Word was God," there was no qualification to be added. Christ's nature was uncreated, and identical with God's. This identity of nature they expressed by the test-word we have already spoken of. The Arians said that Christ was *homoiousios*, "of like substance" to God. The Athanasians said *homoousios*, "of the same substance." They differed, as Carlyle said with a sneer, only upon a single letter, but that letter was the small hinge on which the door of a great truth opened.

Yes, I can see that only in regarding God and Christ as of the same nature can we think of God as not parted from man, and unapproachable, but as united, at least in one point, with our humanity,

and in Christ, at least, immediately accessible to us.

Exactly so; and this explains the pertinacity with which the Trinitarian party insisted on the test-word, *homousios*. It was because, as Dr. Dale has observed, "the ultimate—the spiritual—question at issue was, whether God is a God nigh at hand."

Well, now for my question: Has the underlying cause of the whole struggle been at all removed, so as to give place to some hope of ending controversy?

It seems so to me, and for this reason. The ground of controversy was furnished by the belief held in common by both parties, that human nature was essentially of a different kind from the divine. You remember my quotation to that effect from Athanasius: "We were fashioned out of the earth. He [Christ] is by nature and substance Word and true God." This assumed difference of natures made it impossible for Arians to see how real Deity could share such humiliation and suffering as Christ's. The Athanasians on the other hand were content to accept the Scriptural testimony that God Himself had so done. They took the Pauline saying, "*God was in Christ*," in its strict and unqualified sense. But, later, this

difference of natures, about which nothing appears in the Nicene Creed, had to be fully stated.

I would like to know exactly when and how.

At the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451. This not only reaffirmed the Nicene statement that Christ was of the same substance [*homoousios*] with the Father, but added that He was also of the same substance [*homoousios*] with man: "Consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood . . . to be acknowledged in two natures.

Two "natures," then, seems, as you said, to mean about the same as two "substances."

Very nearly. By "nature" is meant the substance as manifest in its proper powers and qualities. This is the term used in the modern version of the statement of Chalcedon, which you have in the Westminster Confession, that Christ "was, and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures, and one Person forever." Now this settlement has always been protested against, in the name of reason, though not always according to reason, from that day to this, and it cannot be regarded as a final settlement.

But has not the most devout and godly part of the church always accepted it?

It has; but why? For the indispensable truth

which it contains, that "very God," no created and inferior being, is "*in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.*" A God who is near, not a far off Deity, is a necessity of spiritual life. Consequently, Christian thought has specially insisted on the truly divine nature of Christ.

But has not orthodox Trinitarianism recognized Him as having also a truly human nature?

Yes, this has been formally recognized in creeds, but in fact it has not been so. The emphasis has been altogether put on the other side. Insisting on the unbiblical formula, "Christ was God," theologians have dropped the qualifying Biblical phrase, "*the man Christ Jesus.*" From early times till recently, the so-called orthodox idea of Christ has so sunk His humanity in His Deity, as to recognize in Him little more than the show of manhood.

But it is not so now, is it?

No; the effort of Christian thought in recent years has been to do justice to the neglected truth of the manhood of Christ, the neglect of which has cost the church dear through the one-sided supernaturalism that it has fostered, as in the sacerdotal ideas of salvation by sacraments, and the scholastic ideas of salvation by dogmas—from both of which most of the skepticism in Christendom has come.

The human life of Christ has been studied for a generation as never before. This, at least, has been a happy result of the long Unitarian protest.

In this point, as I should judge from some sermons on the humanity of Christ that I have heard in Trinitarian churches, the two parties have come to some agreement.

It is so ; they are very largely now at one in recognizing Him whom Paul calls "*The image of the invisible God,*" Him whom Paul also calls "*The man Christ Jesus,*" as a man thoroughly, with all the essential limitations of human nature, but without any of its accidental stain and sin. In fact, it is beginning to be felt that in Christ there is not only more of God than is elsewhere seen, but also more of man. Christ is not only more divine than any one of us ; He is also more human. This, as you see, points to the truth we have already insisted on, that Deity and Humanity are not two natures, but one.

Yes, but now how does this tend to the removal of the old rock on which the parties split ?

In this way : this study of humanity, as seen in its perfection in Christ, has run parallel with and auxiliary to the development of a better psychology—that is, a better account of what human nature is. For a right idea of this it seems a thing of

course that we should study human nature at its best, not merely in its depraved conditions. This, with other considerations, has led many thinkers of both parties to break with the ruling idea of the past, and the underlying ground of their long dissension, that our nature is in its essence undivine and different from God's.

I see how the study of manhood as it appears in Christ would tend that way. But you referred to "other considerations."

We were speaking of such in our previous conversation, especially of this: That the moral and spiritual element, which is the essential core of humanity, must be identical in nature with the moral and spiritual essence of Deity, else we could have no certainty that righteousness in man is the same kind of thing that it is in God. Only on this ground, as I have before said, can we find any immutable basis for morality, or any logical and practical ground for Paul's exhortation, "*Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children.*"

Yes, I remember; and that took hold of me so that I am eager to know what more you have to add to it.

Let me answer by asking you if you have ever felt a practical difficulty in recognizing Christ as the pattern Man, whom we are bound to copy?



I own that I have. When it has been put to me in sermons that I ought to overcome my temptations as Christ overcame His, the appeal has been somewhat neutralized by the thought that Christ could, because He was God as well as man, while I have no such advantage.

That is just the palsy effect which the fallacy of "two natures" in Christ produces in a great many who hear the inspiring appeal of the Apostles to Christ as our example, the ideal of Christian aspiration. When men think that in Christ God was allied with man in a kind of union forever unattainable by any other son of man, not all, but the majority, feel that the obligation is weakened by the impossibility. Hence a good deal of moral negligence shelters itself under the idea which your Westminster divines have expressed: "No mere man since the fall is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God." Here again you see there is a moral exigency for recognizing the unity of the divine and human. If Christ is to be our leader, and we His followers, in the struggle for righteousness, then He and we must be on the common ground of one nature, He with no advantage of indwelling Deity that is essentially impossible to us.

I see this clearly. Now, as I understand you,

the two parties are approaching agreement in the view that there is but one spiritual nature, and that this may be indifferently spoken of as divine or human.

Yes ; divine on the infinite side ; human on the finite.

Furthermore, you say that this one nature belongs equally to God, to Christ, and to mankind, and that in this fact is grounded the immutableness of moral distinctions, and the possibility of moral progress.

Yes ; and now I think you see how it is that Unitarians are to-day found who accept the Nicene affirmations of the deity of Christ, and take its test word, *homoousios*, as true, not for Christ alone, but for the whole race to which He belongs.

I do, and I see how all who, with Dr. Hedge, insist on the strict humanity of Christ, may join him in thinking that the Nicene theologians builded better than they knew, and gained a great victory for truth, when they made the *homoousios* a point of the catholic faith. But tell me now, what objection can Trinitarians make to agreement in these views ?

Speaking as a Trinitarian myself, I can see no reasonable objection, since in these views Christ

appears to be all divine, as well as all human. But this conception was long ago reached by Lutheran Trinitarians in their "Formula of Concord" (A.D. 1576), affirming that Christ is God when He dies, and man when He judges the dead. This thoroughly accords with Christ's thought, "*The Father is in Me and I in Him;*" "*The Father that dwelleth in Me He doeth the works.*" Christ's way of speaking requires us to think of Him not as God *and* man, but as God *in* man, and man *in* God.

But will not Trinitarians object that according to these views we are all God, and that this is Pantheism?

Not with good reason. It certainly is not Pantheism. Pantheism not only holds that God is in all things, but that God is nothing more than a name for the sum of all things. Pantheism recognizes God as no more than immanent, that is, indwelling in all things. Christianity recognizes this also, but much more, God transcendent, above all things. Plainly enough, God immanent is "very God," yet is not God transcendent. This is what Trinitarians have always been careful to affirm, the Son is not the Father, but the Father is in the Son. And do you not remember how Jesus quotes approvingly one of the Old

Testament sayings which attribute divinity to man?—"I said, ye are gods." Microscopic, indeed, but divine are we, sparks, as it were, of the flame of Deity.

But do not Trinitarians say that Christ is the Creator of all things, and quote St. Paul for it, "*one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things?*"

Yes; I suppose many imagine that to mean that the Son was the agent to whom the Father delegated the work of creation. But Athanasius vigorously protests against the idea that the Father simply begot the Son, and then the Son made all things. Not only the ancient Trinitarians, but the Scripture itself repudiates such an idea. Jesus says, "*My Father worketh even until now.*" But have you noticed that the Revised Version has changed the text you quoted?

No; how should it read?

Instead of "by whom," it reads "*through whom are all things.*" Accordingly we must modify the same phrase in the Nicene creed, and read "through whom" instead of "by whom."

But does this materially alter the sense?

I think it does in this way. First, it is less open to a mechanical interpretation, in the sense of a delegated worker. Next, while it regards Christ as the cause of all things, it permits us to distinguish

between God as the original Cause, by whom all things were made, and Christ as the final cause—the end for which are all things.

You will need to explain this further; it is a nice point, and new to me.

It is a nice point, but for any clear and true thinking on this subject it is all important. It can, however, be made very clear. In accord with the Scripture, the Creed recognizes not the Son but the Father as Creator. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible." In what sense, then, can Christ be the cause "through whom are all things?" Certainly not as the First Cause, but as the Final Cause. Christ, not as isolated, but as the Head of the perfected humanity, whose Divine Ideal He is, is the end for which all things have their being, their Final Cause.

I see the reasonableness and the need of the distinction which reserves the work of creation to the Father. But does not the phrase, "through whom," carry the idea that this Final Cause is somehow instrumental to the making of things?

Certainly, and so that very text indicates, when it goes on to say, "*and we through Him.*" Christ is the instrumental cause of our being, as Paul says, "*children of God through faith in Him.*" He is

also the final cause of our being what we are. That is, we exist for Him, for the realization of a Divine humanity in solidarity with Him. In the combination of these two thoughts you have the right point of view. The Divine End, or final cause, of all things, is the consummate and perfect life, of which Christ is the type. But this Divine Life is not an end outside the process of its development. It is immanent in the whole process as the quickening and organizing principle of the whole. It is at once the end, or consummation, and the instrumental cause of the whole movement. Have I made it clear?

I think I can see it as you do. It reminds me of the point you made, that before the advent of the historic Christ the essential Christ had begun to appear in a succession of more or less Christly men, prophets and sages, who were forerunners to prepare His way.

Undoubtedly, what we see in Christ is the Divine Life that has ever been immanent in the world, ever unfolding itself toward its perfect glory, as both the instrumental and the final cause of all things.

It is a grand thought, and to me, at least, it seems grandly true. But now will not Trinitarians say that, after all, your idea of the strict

identity of nature in Christ and in us lowers the height at which the Apostles view Him as immensely above all other men, even the godliest? Will they not say that thus we do away with the peerless uniqueness of "*the only begotten Son of God?*"

Very likely, but not well. If they read their Bibles more carefully than some of them seem to do, they will observe that Luke speaks also of Adam as "*son of God.*" What we do away with is not the uniqueness that is denoted by "*only begotten,*" but only a false theory about it. You get the Scriptural point of view when you notice that the Epistle to the Hebrews calls Isaac the only begotten son of Abraham, as being the son of special promise, though Abraham had an older son, Ishmael. So this same epistle speaks of Christ as "*the first begotten.*" Accordingly, we must refuse to recognize the term "*only begotten*" as belonging to Christ in virtue of any difference of nature from us. We discover the ground of it in an exceptional fulness of life, not only filled, but saturated—iron white with heat is the Athanasian simile—with consciousness of the indwelling Father. Far beyond all human experience as this is, yet Paul does not deem it essentially and forever impossible to man; for he looks forward

*“till we all attain unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”*

You have so fully disposed of every point where a possible objection might rise, that, if I suggest one more, it is only for the sake of completeness. Jesus, in His parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, draws a wide contrast between the prophets, as God's servants, and Himself, as God's Son. The same contrast recurs in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Moses is said to have been “faithful as a servant, but Christ as a son.” Might it not be said, that this shows Christ to have been related to God in a way essentially different from the godliest of the men of old?

Indeed, it does show this, and I admit the fact of such a difference. But you see that the question is still left open: In what does this difference consist? Does it consist in such a difference of nature as is alleged between the divine and the human? We have observed the grave difficulties besetting such a view. Does it not, then, consist in a difference of spirit, as between the legal spirit of a servant, and the loving spirit of a son? Undeniably, there was such a difference between Jesus and Moses. This, indeed, may be said to be only a moral difference, but moral differences are as essential as any. As related to God, the contrasted



terms "servant" and "son" are each ethical, and so the difference which they mark must be ethical. In accordance with this is what Jesus says of John the Baptist: "*There hath not arisen a greater, yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*"

I cordially grant that you have cleared your position of all objections, and that your views commend themselves to me as every way reasonable. But still I can hardly deem it possible that a controversy that has gone on for fifteen hundred years can be put to rest in one generation, or in two. You have easily convinced me, but the very difficulties I have had with current ideas made it easier for me to take the way out as soon as presented. But those who are content with these ideas, and do not see the rational difficulty they involve, will not readily part with them. They will even resent your pointing to the way out of the controversy, as a solicitation to the abandonment of the true faith.

I fear they will. It has always been so, that those who were merely trying to remove the stumbling blocks from the way of faith have been accused of trying to destroy the road. But it is still a most Christian task, and one that we must never give up, however defamed for it, to try to think ourselves together on the questions which

unhappily divide Christian people into hostile camps, especially in regard to this truth of truths, the Trinity, the richest of all truths in its practical connections with human life.

What you have just said reminds me that you are yet far from having given me your full thought about it. I remember your remark that the doctrine of the Trinity has even a larger interest for modern than for ancient thought.

I am convinced that it has, and I desire much to talk it through with you. But we have covered so much ground to-day, that you must wish to go over it in your own mind before we go on together. Very likely you will find questions to put on points that we have already touched. Then, of course, you are aware that there is one most important part of the Trinitarian problem that we have not yet broached at all, the part which relates to the Holy Ghost. For all this I am sure we shall need to take more time another day.

Be sure that I shall look forward to this with lively interest. It is not merely for my own intellectual satisfaction, but for the still larger interest that I shall find in helping others out of the swamps from which you are extricating me.



III.

*THE WORD OR FORM OF GOD*

*AND*

*HOW TO THINK OF THE INCARNATION*

O marvellous! O worshipful!

No song or sound is heard,  
But everywhere, and every hour,  
In love, in wisdom, and in power,

The Father speaks his dear eternal word.

FABER.

### III.

#### THE WORD OR FORM OF GOD

#### AND

#### HOW TO THINK OF THE INCARNATION

It seemed to me, said my friend, on our way from church one Sunday evening a few weeks later, that you had pretty thoroughly cleared of objections the view you gave me. But you were saying when we parted, that in thinking it over I might find need to question you further, and doubtless you had in mind the very points I wish now to ask about. I have been carefully reading over the Epistles of Paul and the Gospel according to John, which seem so clearly to testify that Christ was conscious of a life that He had before He lived in this world. There, for instance, is His saying, "*Before Abraham was, I am.*" Some might object that this is in the Fourth Gospel, about which some critics doubt. But the same thought is in Paul's remark: "*Ye know the grace*

*of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich."* Do not such testimonies to Christ's pre-existence indicate His nature as superhuman?

I think we shall have to look elsewhere to find proof that Christ was superhuman. You know that many people, some of them Christians, but more of them Buddhists, believe that all men have had existence in a previous life. I do not share the belief; it is not incredible; it is rather not proven. But I refer to it as indicating that there is nothing essentially superhuman in the fact, which I do not doubt, of Christ's pre-existence. There is another saying of Jesus in point here: "*No man hath ascended into heaven, but He that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*" The humanity which we see in Christ is not limited to this world, but exists before it, as well as after.

But does not the Scripture expressly affirm that Christ is superior to the angels?

No doubt it does. But it leaves the question open, in what that superiority consists, whether in a higher kind of nature, or in function, influence, and achievement. The point may be illustrated by the superior reverence which, in degree as the

ideals of Christianity obtain preference to all others, we accord to philanthropy as compared with intellectual power. The most potent names, the highest thrones, are those of benefactors. It is these of whom the heavenly doxology in the Apocalypse says, "*they reign upon the earth.*" I think that this is the most reasonable point of view in so obscure a subject as the relation of Christ to the angels. The Redeemer of the human race may well be thought of as the Apostles describe him, a prince of princes in the world of spirits.

I have met with the suggestion that the angels may be simply the perfected spirits of just men. Do you think that probable?

It is possible. The whole subject is a field for conjecture. At least, we may say that the angels are identical in spiritual nature with men. Jesus says of the dead who have entered into the life of the world to come, that they are "*equal with the angels.*" But we must not wander from our point. What I think quite certain is, that the *homoousios*, which the Creed affirms of Christ and the Father, is a universal fact in the world of spirit. The essential core of human nature is spirit. Jesus says, "*God is Spirit.*" The Scriptures term angels "spirits." However manifold in rank, spiritual nature is of one kind.



Is there then no line between God and man?

Let me answer by asking, Is there a line between the Infinite and the finite? We recognize what is Infinite, and what is finite. We see that the one is not the other. But we can draw no line and say, Here the finite ends, and here the Infinite begins. According to the Scriptures, the one is so in the other that no line can be drawn between them. Paul teaches, both that God is in us, and we in God. *"In Him we live, and move, and have our being."* He *"is over all, and through all, and in all."*

But is not John's saying, that the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, became flesh in the Christ, usually taken to mean that, in what we call the Incarnation, God first manifested himself in humanity?

That is, no doubt, the common mistake. But it is corrected by the fact we dwelt on in our last conversation, that before the advent of the historical Christ, the essential Christ had begun to come into the world in a succession of more or less Christly men. In every such man of God, according to the measure of the grace given him, there had thus been what we might call a pre-historic incarnation of the Divine Word. Of these it is true that John says nothing, but we must not mistake silence for

negation. Now but for these the historic Incarnation could not have come to birth in "the fulness of the time."

I am disposed to think that the common notion of the Incarnation is much narrower than it should be. But now I wish you would tell me how you understand that mysterious name, "*the Word.*" As John uses it, it seems so unlike anything else in the Bible. Has it not been supposed to be a piece of Grecian philosophy, and no genuine thought of the Apostle?

Quite unjustifiably so. There is a close parallel to it in the soliloquy of Wisdom in the eighth chapter of Proverbs. The coeternity of Wisdom with Jehovah is there described in terms similar to John's description of the coeternity of the Word with God. All there is of Grecian philosophy in John is simply the form, suited to his times, into which he cast this Old Testament idea of the Eternal Wisdom through which God made all that is. The term *Logos*, or Word, is said to have been borrowed from Philo, a Jewish-Greek philosopher of Alexandria. And it was certainly an improved substitute for the Hebrew term, "Wisdom."

You must explain that, for Hebrew or Greek is all beyond me.

It can be made very plain directly. Professor

Max Müller has given us the key to it in his observation, that a word is simply a spoken thought, made audible as sound. Take away from a word the sound of it, and what is left of it is simply the thought in it. This simple distinction is preserved in the Greek noun, *logos*, in the double meaning which it carries of thought and speech, while its English synonym, "word," means only speech. An English reader loses this in the translation, and it is no small loss. To us a word is something transitory and unsubstantial, which dies upon the air as soon as spoken. But to a Greek there was the abiding thought behind the passing form.

Ah, you have quickly solved the puzzle, and I confess it was a puzzle to me, that what seems so fugitive and unsubstantial as a word should be the name given to that which "*was in the beginning with God,*" and "*was God.*"

Well, you see now what John's phrase conveyed to a Greek. His *Logos*, or Word, meant first, Eternal Thought, and next, a coeternal Utterance of it in outward expression. Here we find that truth of the "Eternal Sonship" which Dr. Martineau has recognized, the Eternal Manifestation of God. So Athanasius used to say, "The Word is always Son." John's further meaning is,

that this Divine Word, or Son, wherein God eternally manifests Himself, is as really Divine as God Himself: God immanent in the finite manifestation is one with God transcendent in His Infinitude.

What, do you say that the Word was God, and yet finite?

Finite only as to form ; infinite as to what the form suggests or expresses. How else could we think? By "Word" some kind of form is meant, and any form must be finite. But the Word is the form taken by the Infinite Intelligence, which transcends all forms. And this, whether under a form or above it, is God. I think you must see that in the very nature of things the Infinite Deity cannot be apprehended by finite minds except under some finite form, or "Word ;" while that which we apprehend under such a form must be the Deity Himself.

But are you not departing here from the Athanasian orthodoxy? You were saying in our previous conversation that the Arians held that Christ was of a created nature, and not eternal, while the Athanasians held the contrary. I agree with you that in the nature of things the Word, the "form of God" in which, according to Paul, Christ pre-existed, must be finite. I do not so clearly see

how this differs from the Arian idea of a nature that is created, not eternal.

But you will admit this, that while an infinite form is a contradiction in terms and unthinkable, it is not so with an eternal form. That is recognized in Plato's doctrine of "ideas," as the eternal patterns of the things that are created in time. And what did Tennyson say when anticipating the future reunion with his dead friend?

"Eternal form shall still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside."

For my part I cannot think of the eternal Intelligence as without some coeternal Form of utterance or expression. Most true is Faber's thought :

"Everywhere, and every hour,  
In love, in wisdom, and in power,  
The Father speaks his dear, eternal Word."

Neither can I think of this eternal Form, or "Word," as created, in the Arian sense of the term. By creation Arius meant an act of God that was voluntary but not necessary to Him, something that He could dispense with. But the Athanasian thought is, that self-expression is a necessity of nature to the Infinite Mind. A dumb God was to them unthinkable. And so they put into the Nicene Creed that clause which says of the

Son, "Begotten, not made." By creation the Arians understood things which did not always exist, and their usual formula said of the Son, "There was a time when He was not." The Athanasians, on the contrary, affirmed as in the Nicene formula His eternal existence: "Begotten of His Father before all worlds."

Well, I cannot see but that you are orthodox according to the ancients, even if not according to some moderns. But now let me ask if Paul, in that famous second chapter of his letter to Philippi, does not imply that the pre-existing Christ was the sole Word, or Form, of God.

Not the sole, however the supreme Form. It is singular that the Revisers have not made the same correction there which they made in that other text, in the letter to Timothy, where they have rectified the sense by reading, "*The love of money is a root of all evils;*" not, *the* root. So here, Paul does not say *the* Form of God, as if there were but one, but "*a form.*" His exact words are: "*Who, originally existing in a divine form—literally, a form of God—thought it not a thing to grasp at to be on an equality with God.*" There is no such thing, either in Scripture or in reason, as the one sole Form of God, which is suggested by our mistranslation.

It also seems to me that Paul does not regard the pre-existing Christ as possessing full equality with God, for a thing in possession is not "a thing to grasp at." But please now restate for me concisely the points of this somewhat intricate discussion.

Varying slightly from the order in which they came up, they are these: What John means by "the Word" is God's eternal self-expression in some outward form. Such "*a* Form of God," as Paul calls it, was the pre-existent humanity of Christ. Such "*a* form of God" is our humanity, which, however corrupted, is identical in nature with Christ's. Here I am reminded of Dr. Dale's recent remark, that Christ's Incarnation was not "an isolated and abnormal wonder. It was God's witness to the true and ideal relation of all men to God." \*

That is a remarkable saying. Do you think he means to dissent from the current view as to the miraculous birth of Jesus?

Not at all, though it might be so understood, if one were to take for granted what is by no means true, that there can be no Divine incarnation without a miracle. As to the miracle, that is a separate and wholly independent question. We shall

\* *Christian Fellowship*, p. 159.

come to this point later on. I take Dr. Dale to mean only this: God was not word-less, dumb, or unexpressed in form, until the historic hour when in Christ "the Word became flesh." This event we call by preëminence "*the Incarnation*," since in Christ the Divine Word finds fullest utterance. But it is no detached event, it is the issue of an eternal process of utterance, the Word "*whose goings forth*," as Micah said, "*have been from of old, from everlasting*." Since all that is finite proceeds from the Infinite and Self-existent One, all the forms of finite existence are embodiments of Him, expressions of His Eternal Intelligence, and, therefore, though in varying fulness of expression, His Word.

What you have said reminds me of what I was reading the other day :

"Let each man think himself an act of God,  
His mind a thought, his life a breath of God."

I realize the profound truth of this much more clearly for what you have said.

Certainly, it is only when we enlarge our thought of the Incarnation, and view it no longer as an isolated and abnormal wonder, but rather as the luminous and convincing act, which reveals the eternal process of the Word as taking effect not in



Christ only, but in us also, that the kinship of all human lives in God begins to be realized in a divine sympathy of each with each; our separate lives cease to seem so exclusive of each other, and our human brotherhood is profoundly felt in a sense of our real unity in the Divine Fatherhood. So the scattered pools in the rocks by the shore are united by the inflow of the sea tide.

Yes, and now I begin to understand what your Episcopalian friends who are interested in the laboring men mean by their idea of studying social problems "in the light of the Incarnation." But here, at any rate, if not before, it seems to me we part company with the old Athanasian orthodoxy. What you said in our first conversation made it plain that they differed from Dr. Dale's idea of the Incarnation. Did they not regard it as an isolated and abnormal wonder?

They certainly did. They recognized the Divine Word, or Son, in Christ only. To them He only was the proper issue of the Father's nature, and begotten of Him. All we were of alien nature, fashioned from earth. But they did well in securing that Christian thought should ever recognize, at least in one elect member of our race, the nature of very God. Thus they laid the foundation on which advancing thought now reaches up

to that larger and truer conception of our humanity, on which we base our hope of realizing a divine morality in individual life, and a divine order in the social organism.

What you have just said recalls a remark you have already made, that the Trinitarian doctrine has a larger interest for modern than for ancient thought.

Yes ; but before we take that up let me ask you a question, for we must make it still clearer, if we can, how we should think on this whole subject of the *Logos* and the Incarnation. Have you not had this idea of the Incarnation, that it was the entrance of the Divine Substance, or Essence, into combination with a human substance, or essence?

I have, but we have disposed of that idea, the fallacy of the "two natures." Indeed, it seems to me a rather gross and mechanical conception, like that of an alloy of different metals. I agree with you that we ought to give up such phrases as "the union of God and man," because they inevitably suggest some such mechanical idea. I greatly prefer the way of speaking which you have suggested, the *manifestation* of God in man.

Very well ; now as to this manifestation of God, which the Athanasians thought of under the names of *Logos* (or Word) and Son, how do you

think of it—as the manifestation of the Divine Substance or Essence, or of Divine Powers—properties and qualities?

I do not know. I have never asked myself that question, and have never analyzed my thought on that subject. Does it make any difference what one thinks about that?

It seems to me that it does. In the first place we do not know anything about substance or essence, whether material or spiritual, human or divine. All that we know is the properties or qualities of substances. Who can know what iron is in its essence, apart from its properties or qualities? No more can we know what man is in essence, or what God is. We must strictly keep to what we know. Then next, to avoid pantheism, we must distinguish between God and all that derives existence from Him. John does so in his thought of the *Logos*, the Form in which Infinite Intelligence eternally finds utterance. Not only does he say, "*the Word was God*," thus identifying the two, but also, "*the Word was with God*," thus distinguishing the two. Now I think it of great importance to guard this distinction, and so I would draw a firm line between the Divine Substance, of which we can know nothing, so wholly transcendent is it to all thought, and the Divine powers,

properties and qualities immanent in the visible forms of existence, and clearly recognizable as proper objects of thought. In so doing we shall not only steer clear of pantheism, but we shall do justice to all of truth that agnosticism can protest for.

I partly understand you, but I should better appreciate your distinction if you would show me how you apply it in your thinking.

Well, take first the subject that is central in all Trinitarian thought, the deity of Christ. What is the popular conception? The ordinary Unitarian insists that Christ was "a mere man." As if there could be such a thing as "mere" man, exclusive of aught above and beyond him, self-centred and self-moved! The ordinary Trinitarian, on the other hand, insists on his formula, that Christ is God *and* man, which we have already discussed. Do you not see that each of them is thinking of substances or essences, the divine and the human, as separate or as combined? They are at a dead-lock simply because they are disputing about that of which it is impossible to know anything.

I see this clearly enough, and it would seem that the only way out is on the other line of thought, dealing solely with the Divine powers

and qualities, so confessedly found in Christ. But it seems strange that this way should not be taken.

I suppose that Trinitarians are afraid, first, of conceding anything to Unitarians, as persons to be opposed always, and next, of seeming to be content with something less divine in Christ than "very God," if they should be satisfied to find in Him Divine powers and qualities only.

A groundless fear you deem it, I suppose.

I do, and, as I think, with good reason. For, first, every Divine power and quality pertains to the Divine essence ; next, the Scripture itself leads us on this line. "*We beheld His glory,*" says John, "*glory as of the only begotten, full of grace and truth.*" Here the fulness of God in Christ is expressly recognized as a fulness of moral qualities — "*grace and truth.*" Then, on the other hand, the fact that grace and truth are of the essence of the moral nature, whether in God or man, points to the conclusion we reached some time ago, the identity of this nature, whether viewed in its Divine side toward Infinitude, or on its human side in finiteness.

You have made your point, that we should study Powers, not Substances, quite clear in its application to our thinking about Christ. Please show me now how you apply it further.

I hold that we must take the same line of thinking in regard to the world itself, animate and inanimate, as an embodiment—a sort of incarnation—of God. The Scriptures look on the universe as a real *logos*, or word, of God. “*The heavens declare the glory of God.*” “*Day unto day uttereth speech.*” St. Paul tells us that “*the invisible things of God since the creation are perceived through the things that are made.*” Indeed, to a large part of mankind the main part of Revelation has come in this line. Even we shall find that Nature has much to tell us of God which even Christ has not told us, supremely important as is what Christ has told us.

- I suppose it would be well if theologians were better students of nature as interpreted by science.

This is what Dr. Dale says about it: “This new scientific conception of the order of nature will compel Christendom to revise some of its theological conceptions concerning the life of God.”\* And Principal Fairbairn says: “As is your God, such will your system be, and you can no more read theology through Christ alone than you can read Nature through one individual fact.”† Now, on the line of the Biblical idea that the universe is a

\* *Christian Fellowship*, p. 185.

† *Address at the Congregational Council in London.*

word, or *logos*, of God, what do we look to find therein?

Not the Divine Substance, I suppose, but the Divine Thought, God's wisdom, power, etc.

Just so. But on the contrary, the pantheist tries to identify the world with God in substance, precisely as many Trinitarians identify Christ. And we have to make the same protest in each case; each goes beyond the limits of possible knowledge. The only practicable way of thought for each is in the line of Powers. It is as plain in the universe as in the person of Christ, that here are embodied Divine Powers. These, as in Christ, are of the Divine Essence, however unknowable that is in itself.

True. I remember long ago meeting the astronomer Herschel's suggestion, that the force of gravitation seemed like that of a universal will.

Even so. All the forces of the universe, whether molecular or cosmical, must be full of Infinite Intelligence, for the plain reason that we see everywhere a mathematical order and proportion and precision; but mathematics can be nothing else than the expression of Mind. However, these conceptions of Power, Will, Intelligence, may be rather too abstract for the purpose of our discussion. I prefer the more concrete thing

which comprehends and unites them all in a vivid form.

What is that?

It is that familiar yet mysterious complex of Power or Force, Will, and Intelligence or Mind, which we know by its properties as *Life*, while totally ignorant as to what it is in its essence. It is on the line of thought which an adequate conception of *Life* opens to us that we shall come to that larger interest which the Trinitarian idea of God possesses for modern as compared with ancient thought. It is on this line that we shall yet find science and Scripture consenting in the Trinity as the truth of truths, the comprehensive expression of God's relation to the world and to all that in it is.

This is so new a thought to me that I am deeply interested to have it unfolded.

Let us then begin with what we see and know. Here is the phenomenon of *Life*, myriad-faced in its variety of form, yet strangely one in its instincts, in its self-propagating energy, in its power to transform inorganic elements into organisms. Earth, air, and sea all teem with it, in things visible and invisible. Omnipresent, inextinguishable, wonder-working in its evolutionary process from the amoeba up to man, wonderful in its conscious-



ness, its energy, its intelligent use of means to ends, its endless variety, and yet, from first to last, *one* in its many branching, ever widening stream—what and whence this familiar miracle, this thing at once so natural and so supernatural, that we name *Life*? Certainly, it is the Sovereign Power among the other powers of the world, intelligently making all things the vassals of its will, the instruments of its intelligence.

Yes, and it is not the product of anything else, but rather the producer of things.

Exactly so; the scientists agree that life can come only from life. It is fairly describable in the phrase of the Nicene Creed, “begotten, not made—through whom all things were made.” Nor do I think that any one doubts that life existed before the world was, a stream coeternal with its fount in Deity. Here then, “in the beginning,” as the Scripture says, at the starting point of thought, we find the Father and the Son coexisting, as the All generating Life and the Life which is generated, and therefore filial.

This seems to me a rather wide enlargement of the early Trinitarian notions.

It is, and yet not in a different line from the suggestion of Athanasius, who tells the Arians that “the Son is the Living Will of the Father.” Nor

can I think of a fitter phrase than this to describe the stream of life that eternally issues from the fountal Deity. For Will is power, both mental and moral. So Tennyson says :

“O Living Will, that shalt endure  
When all that seems shall suffer shock,  
Rise from the Spiritual Rock,  
Flow through our deeds, and make them pure.”

Do you think it might be objected, when you thus identify the term “Son” with the universal Life that is begotten of God, that you take from Christ what is a glory peculiarly His own?

It would not be an intelligent objection. Christ’s glory is not shown by any absence of the Divine Life elsewhere, but by its unequalled fullness in Him, in whom, as Paul says, “*all things come to a head.*” Nay, I think the view we take is peculiarly Scriptural.

Please mention some of the passages you have in mind.

Well, there is the Old Testament phrase so often repeated, “*the living God,*” so much better than the modern phrase, “personal God,” which is almost always misunderstood to mean that God is an individual, existing in separateness from other individuals. This inspired thought conceived of God as self-existent Life—a word that includes the

necessary elements of personality—self-consciousness, spontaneity, and intelligent power, without any of the limitations that our fragmentary human personality suggests. Then the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "*The Word of God is living,*" (A. V. "quick,") which recalls Jesus' saying, "*The Father hath life in Himself, and hath given to the Son to have life in Himself.*" Then John, speaking of Christ, says, "*We show unto you the Life, the Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.*" This, again, recalls Jesus' great sayings, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life;*" "*I am the Resurrection and the Life;*" "*The Living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.*" And so it seems to me, as we follow out our line of thought about Divine Powers on the line of Life, as the Sovereign and Comprehensive Power, that we find it to be a truth in which science and Scripture agree, that every incarnation of life is, *pro tanto*, and in its measure, an incarnation of God; and that the age-long way of God, so far as we can trace it in the world, is in a perpetually increasing incarnation of Life, whose climax and crown is the Divine fulness of Life in Christ.

I quite enjoy your exposition. But please add one more to the fresh thoughts which you have been giving me out of these old texts: What does

the Apostle mean by saying, "*In Him* [Christ] *all things consist?*"

I take it, in the literal sense of the word "consist,"—i.e., stand together—to mean that all things have their unity, reach the one common end of their existence, in Him. This the context shows: "*were created through—that is, because of—Him and unto Him.*" The Divine end for which all things exist is the manifestation of the Divine humanity in Christ, with a view to its ultimate realization in all. So Jesus said: "*I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one.*" For this all earlier life came forth. I may illustrate it thus: The dome, the crowning glory of such a pile as St. Peter's church, is the end for which all the lower parts of the building exist. They all reach their end and find their unity in this. Thus Paul would say, all the innumerable ranks of Life, of whom Christ is the resplendent Head, "were created in Him," and "consist," or stand together, in Him, whom they were to lead up to and exhibit as their consummation, and the end for which they exist.

I admit the perfect reasonableness of these views. Yet I have seen it objected that while God is certainly the Creator of all life, we cannot regard all life as essentially one, and a thing di-

vine, because it is often hideous and destructive in its varieties, as in snakes and tigers. What would you say to this?

I should say it was foolishly sentimental, like the repugnance of some sensitive people to caterpillars. I should put in contrast with it the better views we find in the Bible. According to Job, it is a divine intelligence that prompts and guides the migrations of the birds: "*Doth the hawk fly by Thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the South?*" If so, it is Divine Intelligence by which the hawk also seeks its legitimate prey. Thus the psalmist thinks: "*The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.*" In all the constitutional instincts of living creatures we see the energizing of the all-pervading, Infinite Mind, which constitutes them what they are. Much as we dread the predaceous creatures, they are, as Dr. Martineau observes, the necessary burial-corps and scavengers of the animal creation. But for them, the air and waters would be poisoned by the decay of animal bodies. Offensive as these scavengers may be to the fastidious tastes of perhaps over-refined people, we must recognize even in their destructive instincts the activity of the Divine Intelligence that animates all life. What Paul says, "*All flesh is not the same flesh,*" indicates merely

that the forms are many, though the life at its root is one.

You carry my thought irresistibly along with yours. The larger interest which the truth of the Trinity has for modern thought I begin to realize better than I could clearly express, for I am only a learner. Would you now restate for me, as concisely as may be, the salient points of the position we have reached?

Willingly ; only bear in mind that the Trinitarian position will not be fully outlined, so long as we have in reserve so important a part of it as the Holy Ghost. What we have gone over I would sum up in this triple statement : (1) The Living Father, Maker of heaven and earth, does not live apart from His creation, but lives in it from the beginning, as its Begotten or Filial Life. And this universal Life, whether existing or pre-existing, whether before the world or in the world, through all its myriad ranks from the highest to the lowest, whether in angels or in amoebas, in men or in the Christ, is His coeternal Word, or Son—His utterance, His offspring. (2) The Living God in His unknown and infinite transcendence above the world is God the Father, but in His revealed immanence in the life of the world is God the Son. In this conception of God, the ancient

chasm between God and man, which error has fancied, and sin has exaggerated, is filled at all points, not at one point only (as in the ancient fallacy of the "two natures" that were said to be conjoined in Christ). The immanent is one with the transcendent Power; the Filial Stream is one with its Paternal Fount. (3) To Christ supremely belongs the name of Son, which includes all the life that is begotten of God. He is the beloved and unique representative of this universal sonship, "*the first-born,*" said Paul, "*of all creation.*" In Christ the before unconscious sonship of the world awakes to consciousness of the Father. Worthiest to bear the name of *the* Son of God, in a pre-eminent but not exclusive right, is He. Nor only has He revealed to orphaned men their partnership with Him in the Life and Love of the All Father. His peerless distinction as the Son is, that in Him shine at their brightest these moral glories which belong to the very crown of Deity.

I thank you very much for this statement. It seems to me that there is this great moral advantage in your view. It makes human life seem a more sacred thing, to be the more scrupulously guarded from degradation, as a thing divine.

True, and here also is the impregnable ground on which rests all philanthropic imitation of

Christ. There is in the lowest man a spark of the Divine Life. I think it is Jean Ingelow who says :

“ The street and market place  
Grow holy ground : each face—  
Pale faces marked with care,  
Dark, toil-worn brows—grows fair.  
King’s children are these all, though want and sin  
Have marred their beauty, glorious within.  
We may not pass them but with reverent eye.”

There is in the most degraded lives an image of God to be brought out, as Michael Angelo said of the angel in the rough block. Said Paul, “ *the head of every man is Christ.*”

Yes, and furthermore, is there not a new spring of sympathy opened by seeing that every incarnation of Life is, in its measure, an incarnation of God?

Indeed there is. Men who have believed that God and man have been united in Christ alone have cruelly persecuted each other. There is no universal bond of human sympathy but in the discovery of the one Life in all lives, and something of God in each. This is the fact that John points to, when he says : “ *He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, cannot love God, whom he hath not seen.*” Here opens the spring of compassion



toward all that lives, not only in human kind, but in the lower creatures also.

I would like to ask you if you have also found in your larger conception of the Trinitarian idea of sonship any personal comfort amidst the troubles and sorrows of life.

I have. When I see that God is not only the Giver but the Sharer of my life, that my natural powers are that part of God's power which is lodged with me in trust to keep and use, I feel on one hand the spur to self-reliance on what there is of God's power in me, as the right way of dependence on what there is of God's power above me. On the other hand, when I am burdened under my weakness and sin, I am prompted to faith that God will not forsake His own, will not abandon what there is of God in me, but, as Paul said, "*will perfect what is lacking.*" Here it seems to me we may find that rock of strength and peace on which Jesus in His sorest need took refuge: "*The Father hath not left Me alone ;*" "*The Father is in Me, and I in Him.*"

You have done me a great service. Your thoughts lift me to a higher and holier view of life than I ever took before. It is true that one has to come at it by some close thinking, but it is clear thinking, with no confusing shadows of mystery.

And it would be as foolish to grudge the effort of getting up to these higher ranges of thought, as to grudge the hill-climbing that rewards one with a fair prospect from the top. But I can hardly help smiling at the ridiculous notion I used to have, that the Trinity was a cloudy phantom of speculative philosophers, out of all connection with the real world and practical reason. You have made me see—at least so far as we have gone with it—that it touches life and thought at every point, and is full of practical value.

You will find even more of this in it before we get through. We have been attending mainly, as the Nicene Creed does, to the questions concerning the Son of God. It is here that the difficulties and the interest of the subject have always centred. For what remains we must take another hour. But I would like to leave this remark with you to think upon, for we shall discuss it before we get through. In the line of thought about the Trinity that we have followed lies all 'hope of ridance from the false supernaturalism that has always fomented schism within the church and skepticism outside. In the construction of a complete Trinitarianism on the lines of our present thought lies the solution of the question on which the men of faith and the men of science are yet unhappily

divided: Is the supernatural a reality? And what then is the revelation of the supernatural to the natural?

This is a turn of the subject as unexpected as it is interesting.

And yet you see its immediate connection with our theme. In the world of form, called Nature, Life is the Supernatural Reality, for it is above Nature, the Producer of Nature, not a product. Life is the organizing Power, Nature the organized form. This mystery of Life is one with the mystery of the Living God. His Trinity is the Trinity in His Life. The Father is the Life Transcendent, the Divine Source, "*above all.*" The Son is the Life Immanent, the Divine Stream, "*through all.*" The Holy Ghost—here I must anticipate what we have yet to talk about—is the Life Individualized, the Divine Spherule, "*in all,*" the Divine Inflow into the individual consciousness, giving inspiration to the conscience of each separate child of the Father of all.

Your words recall to me a hymn of Faber's. How you have lighted up the meaning!

"We share in what is Infinite, 'tis ours,  
For we and It alike are Thine."

I feel indebted to you more than I can express.

You have given a new inspiration to my thoughts of God, and man, and life, and Christ. What hard thinking you must have done to untie all the knots of so tangled a subject !

Ah, my dear friend, the hardness is not in the effort of thinking ; it is in the effort to live as we think.



#### IV.

### *THE NEGLECTED TERM IN THE TRINITY*

**"The Consummating Love of God  
The Unit of the Three,"**

**FABER.**

#### IV.

#### *THE NEGLECTED TERM IN THE TRINITY*

WELL, said I, as we started out for a walk some days afterward, does our subject grow upon you?

Every way it does. In the line of thought you have given me it seems to me that I apprehend God more clearly than ever before, as immediately related to the world, and in continual touch with me. No one with your conception of the Trinity can live in a soulless world or an unspiritual life. Ah, how different it seems to me from that chilly fog-bank of mystery that I always avoided with something, as I fancy, of Daniel Webster's feeling, when he remarked about it, that we must not expect to understand the arithmetic of heaven. Why is it that such an intellect as his should be put to such confusion as that remark betrays?

I suppose it is because of the common idea of God, which he shared with the popular thought—a God who is separate from man in nature and in



place, who controls things from outside, as a king controls his realm. The only notion of a Trinity that will fit this non-Christian idea of God is that of a trio, or triplet, of Persons. Then, to save our primal faith in the Divine Unity, it has to be explained that these Persons are not Persons in any earthly sense. But the explanation deepens the mystery. And so some accept the unintelligible and appeal to faith, and some reject it and appeal to reason. It is all because of the false notion they have of God, as an outside God. The Scriptural conception of God, as immanent in the world and in the spirit of man, is indispensable to any rational conception of Trinity in the Self-Existent One.

I suppose, then, you lay it down, as a first principle for right thinking on the subject, that no man can have any fit idea of the Trinity except on the basis of a true idea of God.

Precisely so ; it is the key of the temple. And for a true idea of God we must go to the Scriptures, to the Old Testament teaching of "*The Living God*," to Jesus' teaching of "*The Living Father*," and of Himself as "*the Life*," and to John's teaching of "*the Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us*." Here we discard theological word-play about the un-

knowable substances, divine or human, which long ago brought the disputants into a hopeless deadlock. We turn to the manifest reality of the Powers that issue forth from Deity, especially the complex and Sovereign Power known as Life. The Trinity of the Living God must be a Trinity in His life. And this, according to the Scriptural idea of God—as “*through*,” and “*in*,” as well as “*above*” us—must include these three terms: the Transcendent Divine Life that is above the world, the Immanent Divine Life that is universal through the world and perfected in the Christ, and the Individualized Divine Life that is begotten in each separate consciousness and conscience.

I see you have answered a question that I have not asked you, though I have sometimes put it to myself, why there should be three terms only, a Trinity and not a Quaternity, or more.

I am glad that you have mentioned this. There can be no more, no less, than these three terms, for the simple reason that these include the entire sphere of power, and will, and mind. The whole orb of existence is thus filled in every part, both in mass and in molecule, with the infinite activities of God.

Well, now I want to say that my mind has fastened on the thought you gave me when we

parted, that in the Trinity rightly construed we find the true solution of the difficult question about the relation of the natural and supernatural, and a riddance of the false supernaturalism that infests the church, and provokes skepticism. Shall we take this up now?

I wish by all means to talk that through with you. It is one of the most interesting parts of our subject. But we have not yet gone over the ground on the Trinity. Let us do this first, and then go into that application of it. The Holy Ghost, or, as the American Revisers wish us to say, the Holy Spirit, seems to me to be the term in the Trinity that is specially neglected. We shall do well to take this up at once.

Most willingly. Let me at once bring up the point which always perplexed me. "The Holy Spirit" never seemed to me more than a special name for God. The Father and the Son seem distinct enough. Then it is also plain that the Father in His Fatherhood is more than the Son in His Sonship. The Son must always say, as Jesus said, "*My Father is greater than I.*" But the term "Spirit" seems coextensive with the term "God," as Jesus said, "*God is Spirit.*" So I never was able to see any more than a nominal distinction, quite insufficient to constitute any

Third Person, or Personality, as in the church doctrine.

But you were not more at fault than most Trinitarians are. They generally admit that this is very indistinctly apprehended. It is just as Jesus said : The world cannot receive the Spirit, "*for it beholdeth Him not.*" At any rate, this part of the Trinitarian doctrine has been left undeveloped. The Nicene Creed contents itself with these brief and general terms : "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the prophets." But now bear in mind what we have already insisted on, that we shall come to no clear and rational knowledge except that of Divine Powers as manifested in their operation. It seems to me that this is very significantly intimated by the fact that the Spirit is called the *Holy* Spirit. Do you think that this adjective "Holy" is used as a mere epithet of dignity ?

No ; now that you have suggested it, it is plain that as a mere epithet it belongs quite as much both to the Father and the Son. When reserved specially to the Spirit it must be to denote, besides the general character, a special activity of God.

Exactly so, and so the Scriptures use it. It is simply as Spirit that "*God quickeneth all things.*" In imparting movement to the elements of the world, "*the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,*" as Genesis tells us. In imparting life to the creatures, the Psalmist says, "*Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created.*" But the work of the Holy Spirit Jesus describes thus: "*He shall bear witness of Me ;*" "*He will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment ;*" "*He shall guide you into all the truth.*" Is it not plain why He is called the *Holy Spirit*—not because of what He is, but rather of what He does in producing holiness?

I see this clearly enough. But what reason is there then in conceiving of the Holy Spirit as a distinct Person?

None at all; this conventional and technical phrase is so misleading that Calvin himself expressed his readiness to abandon it, provided the truth it is aimed at be otherwise expressed. The Holy Spirit is God Himself in a special form of His activity—God quickening conscience to truth, and love, and righteousness. The personality of the Holy Spirit is the personality of God energizing in this special line of His power.

I see this, and can hardly conceive of anything

more than this. But will all Trinitarians be content with this? They say the Holy Spirit is something more substantial than a Divine influence. Jesus speaks of the Spirit as "He," and they say you cannot call a mere influence "he."

That is mere word-play. What is the influence of any person? It is not a thing separate from the person, and set in motion by him. Any person's influence upon us is simply some one's personality influencing us. We feel it, and it is *he* whom we then feel. The contention, that the Holy Spirit must be more of a personality than a Divine influence can be, is simply a piece of the pagan way of thinking about God that still is common, thus: God is far off. His influence is like that of the stars, a ray remote and faint. If He comes to us personally, it must be by sending a member of the Trinity, a personal being, the Holy Spirit. But the Biblical thought of God as near, and "in us," tolerates no such mechanism. Wherever God is, He is personally.

"Spirit to spirit, Ghost to ghost."

His influence is Himself.

I think the objection well disposed of. Now, as I understand you, you think of the Holy Spirit as God in His special activity for holiness, and by holiness you mean——

Moral perfectness. "*Be ye holy, for I am holy.*" "*Be ye perfect as your Father is perfect.*"

Very good; now how would you demonstrate as clearly marked a distinction here between this third Power and the other two, as there is between those two? Between the Father and the Son there is the obvious distinction of the Transcendent Life and the Immanent—God above all forms, and God within all forms. But what were we saying about the manifestation of the Son? Was it not for the realization of the Divine Life in humanity "*unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ?*" Now, what I want more clear in my thought is this: How does this Divine Power in the manifestation of the Son differ recognizably from the Divine Power in the operation of the Holy Spirit? Do they not seem to run together, and coalesce, as a single activity instead of two? May not one say that the distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit is more nominal than real, each of them being really the personal activity of God for the producing of moral perfection?

You have clearly put a point of which I have myself felt the force. What Paul says of Christ, "*The Lord is the Spirit,*" shows the coalescence of activity you speak of, and is apparently in line

with your suggestion that the distinction is more nominal than real. But we shall find the ground of a broad and plain distinction as soon as we scrutinize the actual facts of life. Has it not sometimes occurred to you, that while we all share one life in common, each has a distinct individuality of his own? As no one leaf of the forest is in every particular the duplicate of another, so it is with us men. The type is one, the temperaments are innumerable. The Divine Power is in us all, in one stream of life, but it is in each with a difference of gifts, and so it comes to pass that,

“God fulfills himself in many ways.”

Our consciousness, whether of self, or of God, is strictly our own, so as often to be incommunicable to another. How truly Keble puts it :

“Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,  
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh.  
Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe,  
Our hermit spirits dwell and range apart.”

In this individual consciousness each of us in the great mass, pervaded as it is by a common life, is by himself, both as an object of the Divine regard, and as a subject of a Divine responsibility. Now, this being so, what is our need? Is it not to realize, first, our community as children of one Father



in the one Divine Life of the Son, and next, our individual birthright of grace from Him, and of duty to Him, through the quickening Spirit?

I see it. This last, then, is what you view as the work of the Holy Spirit, to awaken and sustain this individual consciousness of a Divine grace and a Divine duty.

Precisely so. Collectivism is one thing, and individualism is another, but quite as necessary. Just here you find a sufficient ground for the broad distinction you seek between the two lines of the personal activity of God which are represented by the two terms, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

I admit that this is reasonable enough. But is it a Biblical view, as well as a philosophical?

It is. The classical passage is in Paul's discourse to the Corinthians "concerning spiritual gifts." "*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, \* \* \* dividing to each one severally, even as He will.*"

This is a somewhat new view to me. I had always thought of the Spirit as working for collectivism rather than individualism. That same passage you refer to says, "*In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body.*" Then there is the familiar phrase of the apostolic benediction, "*the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*"

True, but what is this communion? It includes the impartation of the Holy Spirit as a Divine gift to all, in whatever diversities to each, together with the impartation by each to others of his own individual share. The very differences and inequalities of our individual shares are thus designed for an individual communication of benefits, which is to build up the collective life of the whole as a life of love. So Paul puts it in his figure of the body, which is "*knit together by that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part.*" A healthy collectivism is impossible apart from a healthy individualism. The life of the whole depends on the life of each and every part. The individual is as important as the mass composed of individuals. As a matter of history, what has come of disregarding the individual? Nothing but despotism in government, stagnation in society, corruption in morals. And do you not see that this is a fundamental condition of all religious and moral progress, that the individual man should regard God as dealing, not only with the church or the state in general, but with him in particular? Each needs to feel himself as responsible to God as any or all others; each needs to feel that God cares for him singly as actively as for all.

I admit it. And I see at once that it is this conviction of individuals from which has sprung all reform, and all those ideas of human rights and duties from which modern liberty, and philanthropy, and the general enrichment of life have proceeded. Is it not just in this point of fostering individualism that Calvin's doctrine of Election is correlated with your doctrine of the Holy Spirit? This was the thing in Calvinism that powerfully promoted democracy, as Fronde observes, by making the peasant believe that in relation to the grace of God he was on a level with the prince.

True indeed. It needs but slight acquaintance with history to see that spiritual life with moral and religious power has ever spread from individual centres—from an Abraham, a Moses, an Isaiah, a Paul, a Luther, from solitary hearts which enshrined a sacred and contagious fire, from lonely seers whose divinely anointed eyes made them prophets and guides to nations. Thus from the Holy Spirit in individual breasts ever flows "the communion of the Spirit," diffusing from man to man the thrill of feeling, the awe of conviction, the mandate of duty, the bowing of conscience to the inner revelation of the Spirit of Truth. Have we not plainly reached here what we were looking for—a grandly distinct line of

Divine Power, attested Biblically, historically, philosophically, as the special activity of the Holy Spirit?

I think so. And what you have been saying recalls a remark of Baron Bunsen, that the chief power in the world is Personality.

I thank you for the word. It suggests this comment, that it is precisely in this line that the historical development has taken place, which distinguishes modern history from ancient history, and Christian lands from non-Christian. The forward movement of the world has been effectual chiefly for the development of this idea of human personality, with its correlated rights and duties. And the historical fact is, that this has taken place chiefly under those Christian influences which are sometimes called "the dispensation of the Holy Spirit." It is precisely in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that the truth of personality is glorified.

I wish you would enlarge a little on this subject of personality. The word is common enough, but my conceptions of the thing are all too vague.

We shall better apprehend what personality is by thoughtful communing with ourselves, than by any elaborate definition of this core of the self-conscious spirit. It is indeed "*the secret place of the Most High*" within us, the very *penetralia* of

our humanity, the shrine where resides the inviolable conscience; where rests the untransferable obligation; where is heard the Divine Voice that speaks to each apart; where is felt that embrace of the Everlasting Arms which assures the humblest and the least of his individual preciousness to God; where glows the sacred fire that no floods of persecution can quench; and whence issue the inspirations which uplift the world. It seems most certain that the realization in the world of the Divine humanity, which is idealized to us under the image of the Son, depends on the realization in the individual of the divineness and sacredness of his own personality. Just this is the work of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus said, "*He shall glorify Me, for he shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you.*"

Please explain this. I do not quite see the pertinence of the quotation.

Why, it is simply this: The work of the Holy Spirit is to quicken and enlighten the apprehension, not in Christians only, but also outside of Christian lines, of those Divine truths concerning man's relation to God which it is the mission of Christ to illustrate. Thus, even before the Gospel has been carried to a pagan land, the Holy Spirit has laid a foundation for it in the germination of some Christian principles there. Within the great

circle of the common life, which is animated by the power of God the Son, are the little circles of the multitudinous individual life, which are the special laboratory of God the Holy Spirit. His distinct work is by His diverse communications to develop in each individual personality that life of Divine Sonship which, whether latent or manifest, is universal in the world, but perfected only in the Christ, and through Him.

You have put it convincingly as well as clearly. The work of the Holy Spirit is the perfection of spiritual life, and this is a line of Divine Power as cardinal and as distinct as the creation of life. I judge, then, that the importance of it to us is the measure of our need to believe in it, as pupils of the Spirit.

I am glad to hear you say so. The Holy Spirit is as necessary an object of Christian faith as the Father and the Son. The poverty and weakness of many nominally Christian lives plainly indicate a faint idea of the Holy Spirit and of what He does. But the work of the Father and the Son is frustrated where the work of the Spirit fails. Thus it is that Christian faith so often degenerates into mere dogma, lifeless and petrified, though still called Christian. Only as led by the Spirit can we realize our fellowship with Christ in sonship to

God. In short, there is nothing so necessary for the invigoration of moral decrepitude as an intelligent faith in the Holy Spirit as the Divine Soul of the soul, "*whose temple,*" says Paul, "*ye are.*"

There is still a question I have to put. All our conversation has had reference to the terms of the Nicene Creed. Now it is just in this part which relates to the Holy Spirit that the Creed has been altered. It was this alteration which divided the Greek from the Roman Church, was it not?

It was. The creed now reads thus: "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." *And the Son* is the addition, made in the year 589 by a local council. Five centuries later it caused the schism you speak of.

What do you think of the propriety of the change?

It seems to me sustained by Scriptural authority, though we cannot cite for it the exact words of Scripture. Jesus indeed says, that the Spirit "*proceedeth from the Father.*" But He also says, "*I will send Him unto you.*" The Spirit is also called "*the Spirit of Christ,*" and "*the Spirit of the Son.*" I think, however, that the change was not merely defensible; it was a required change. It seems to be, as we said about the test-word *homoousios*, a

case where men builded better than they knew. Like that, it indicates how the Spirit of truth has guided Christian thought in these fundamental matters in advance of the maturer attainments of Christian knowledge.

I shall be much interested if you will go more fully into this view of the case.

Just recall, then, what we were saying of "the communion of the Holy Spirit," as including all communication of spiritual benefits from man to man. What is the going forth of spiritual life from the church to the world but the proceeding of the Spirit from the Son? It is, of course, from the Father, as the Transcendent Divine Life, that the Spirit, like all else, originally proceeds. But we have to distinguish in our thought between God in His transcendent activity above the world, and God in His immanent activity within the world. Now the fact that it is by the spirit of those around us that we are habitually influenced to goodness, shows that it is to God within rather than above the world that we must immediately trace the process of the Spirit. It is not only from the historic Christ, but from the Christ in men, from the Divine Sonship that is realized in the world, that the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, ever spreads.



Certainly. If the Spirit of God does not proceed from the sons of God, the world that needs to know God is in a hopeless case.

It is. And is it not wonderful that in that dark time, when the night of the Middle Ages was setting in, this brief addition was made to the original Creed, supplying the further testimony needed to so precious a truth as this, that the abiding Life of God in human lives is the immediate source of the Power that works for righteousness?

I think so. And it seems to me more than a theoretical conception, if only one looks at in your broad way, regarding ourselves as partners with Christ in the Divine Sonship. This added clause in the Creed really lays emphasis on the practical duty of every son of God to see to it that the Holy Spirit goes forth from him to his neighbors.

Well, now in view of all this, if such an advance could be made on the original Trinitarianism even in that period of the world, does it seem improbable that some further expansion of the ancient lines can be effected by Christian thought to-day?

Not at all. It rather seems inevitable, in view of what you have shown me of the fundamental change that has come upon Christian thought, both as to the oneness of human nature with the Divine,

and as to the active indwelling of God within the world and in all its life.

It has been my fixed conviction for years that such an expansion of the original lines must ultimately come. I do not think that the Christian world can rest permanently content with the limits of thought which the ancient Trinitarians reached. An arrested development of theology in this point will surely tend, as it has tended, to skepticism. But now that we have gone through the whole subject point by point, I doubt not that you are quite of another mind than when you said, at the outset, that you were not much of a Trinitarian.

Indeed, I do not see how any Christian man can be anything but a Trinitarian, provided he has the Scriptural idea of God as in the world, as well as above it, and in the individual as well as in the general life. But what has interested me most is not the mere theoretical comprehension of the truth that you have given me, but its evident practical worth for spiritual culture.

That is just my interest in it, and my interest in opening it to others. It is of small consequence to believe that there is a God. This "*the devils also believe, and shudder,*" as James has told us. The momentous thing is, to know how God is related to the world and to me. The consequential thing

is, to reach such knowledge about this as to inspire an abiding faith and hope and love. Just this is what we come to in the Trinity. Here we are shown that the Infinite and Self-Existent and Hidden One, whom the agnostic hesitates even to name, is both the Paternal Source of all that is, and also at the growing tip as at the primal root of all that is—inhabiting all forms with His intelligent Power, and making all that live the multiform channels of His Filial Stream of life—then, as the Holy Breath, whose promptings generate our prayers, perfecting His life in us by the inspirations which become our aspirations to realize our sonship to Him. Representing all this, the Trinity becomes to us the expression of the Christian idea of God, in His gracious relation to the dependent world. Now this idea of God has a name to fit it, and what is that name?

“The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost”—the *Triune Name*, as I can now call it with a better understanding of it.

Just so. Now by its peculiar name of God, enshrining and expressing its peculiar idea of God, Christianity is the only faith in God which answers to the world's need. The symbol of this faith is the Trinity. Christ, in parting with His disciples, left it with them as their concise, suffi-

cient and all comprehending Creed. "*Baptize them,*" said He, "*into the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*" Dr. G. P. Fisher has well spoken of the Trinity as "a hieroglyphic." Such it is, a symbol pregnant with sacred power. "It represents," says Dr. Schaff, "the whole of Christianity, as a brief summary of all the truths and blessings of Revelation."

You remind me of a remark of Charles Kingsley, that whether the doctrine of the Trinity be in Bible, or no, it ought to be there, for our spiritual nature cries out for it.

Even so. What we want is some watchword and pledge of the vital and active union of the One with the All, of the Highest with the humblest. Just that has Christianity given us in the Triune Name. To the weary and troubled world it comes like an angel's chant, repeating evermore, "*The Eternal is thy Refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms.*"

I now realize this more vividly than ever before. You have made light fall on many dark questionings that have troubled me. There is so much in the world that looks like grim fate. The iron wheels of nature grind, and grind, and tears drop, and blood flows, and there seems no sympathy for us in the vast machine. Is this the work

of Fatherly Power? How often I have been tempted to cry out, There is no Father; my Lord is Fate!

I have had the same experience. But now what it is that brings us out of the fog and mire of such despondency, you see. In the worst straits Job still cleaves to his integrity. At such a time it is God in conscience, the Holy Spirit, who reminds us that we are not clay but spirit, free, at least to what righteousness we will. Accepting this as our true freedom, we enter through the narrow door of duty into the wide communion of the Spirit with all the like-minded, especially with the cross-bearing Christ. We hear His note of triumph: "*In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*" His assurance begets our confidence, that the Power within the iron wheels is not malign; that goodness is there, eternal, invincible. Our eyes are opened; we see how inseparable are "*the kingdom and patience of Christ.*"

"Thy pierced Hand guides the mysterious Wheels,  
Thy thorn-pierced Brow now wears the crown of Power.

Thus we come by the Son to the Father. Thus through the Spirit we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and in the wildest rage of earthly tempests the peace of God.

Is it your thought, then, that our faith in God, must, so far as it a real experience, grow from faith in the Holy Spirit, God in conscience, teaching us to realize our sonship to Him?

I do indeed think so. We may discover God everywhere, but we close with Him nowhere, if not within ourselves. Here only does His light first rise on our darkness. Here, in the inspiring Breath of "the Comforter," are the springs of all our power to do or bear. The church has by no means made enough of this. The question which Paul put to "certain disciples" at Ephesus, is now, as then, a critical question for us all: "*Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?*"

I believe this is what you were lately saying, that the defectiveness of much nominally Christian life is due to a defective recognition of the Holy Spirit.

It is too true. The church has been so intent on maintaining "the form of sound words" concerning the deity of the Son, that she has forgotten that without the Spirit the form is of little worth. So there has been a great deal more of orthodoxy than of spiritual life. There is nothing so imperative now as to develop in Christian consciousness and experience that pregnant clause of the Creed, "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

I think that if church teachers believed thoroughly in the actual guidance of the Spirit, they would not be so afraid of new discoveries, and untrodden paths ; they would not in every generation repeat the Jews' mistake of stoning the prophets.

Ah, I fear we are all of us, in one way or another, under the same cloud. "*Lord, help our unbelief!*" is the prayer that befits us all.

V.

*SUPERNATURALISM, FALSE AND TRUE*  
*THE TRINITARIAN TEST*  
*THEOCENTRIC THEOLOGY*



“—When I see boys ride a cock-horse,  
I find it in my heart to embarrass them  
By hinting that their stick’s a mock horse,  
And they really carry what they say carries them.”

BROWNING.

## V.

### *SUPERNATURALISM, FALSE AND TRUE.* *THE TRINITARIAN TEST.* *THEOCENTRIC THEOLOGY.*

SHORTLY afterward, as I was idly busy in my library, my friend dropped in. What do you think, he brightly asked, has come oftenest to my mind from our last conversation?

Indeed, you will have to tell me that.

It was the fact of that wonderful addition to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which the Nicene Creed acquired in the sixth century, in an age when both learning and Christianity were in a long decline. And with this your question continually recurred: Can we not, then, in this age, expect some further expansion of the old lines? It seems to me that we must expect it.

I think so, too. But that is not all we must expect.

Pray, what else?

Has that sixth century extension obtained general acceptance even yet?

No, the Orthodox Greek church still regards it as heretical, and excommunicates all its adherents, the larger part of Christendom.

Well, something similar we may still expect. Doubtless, many will move on into the larger Trinitarianism which modern thinking requires. But quite as many will stay within the narrower lines of the past, and will imitate the Greek church in calling themselves "the orthodox." I believe the resemblance will end there. There is too much of the Holy Spirit now in the church to permit the new Trinitarianism to be again excommunicated by the old.

So I trust. And now, since you speak of the new lines on which our thought runs, will you for the sake of perfect clearness name in a summary way the main points through which you think these new lines will be drawn?

Briefly, they are these two, the Incarnation and the Divine Sonship. It is our enlarged conceptions of these two which necessarily expand the old Trinitarianism. For instance: Men have been pointed to Christ as the solitary Incarnation of God. They reject it because it seems to be an iso-

lated wonder. To accept it, they must be shown that, as Dr. Dale has said, it is not so. The Divine Life which appears in Christ full-orbed had had through previous periods its long prelude of grey twilight and brightening dawn. It is an ethical life, and ethical life is not a thing of sudden generation, but of long development. The Incarnation of God is not a mere event, but an age-long process, of which we see in Christ the consummate ripeness. In like manner, men reject the Trinitarian idea of the Son of God, because it is represented as an abnormal thing—the very substance of God passing through human birth into but a single individual of our race. We escape this difficulty also, when we gain an enlarged idea of the Divine Sonship. We view it as constituted not by the generation in one individual of a Divine Substance (a thing we can know nothing of), but by the generation in all of a Divine Power, a Life which is, seminally at least, Divine.

Do you mean to take exception to the doctrine of the miraculous conception and the virgin birth?

No, that is on independent ground as simply an act of Divine power. It depends on nothing so unthinkable as the generation of a Divine Substance in a human body. Whether one accepts it or not, this, at least, is true: All life, whether

miraculously or naturally generated, is generated by God, and in all its forms and varieties is filial to the Paternal Life of the All-Father. The biologist affirms that all life is radically one. The theologian must add that all life is radically Divine. What is ethical is Divine. In the higher ranges of life its ethical nature becomes strikingly apparent. The rudiments of this ethical nature appear even in the life of the lower creatures. What comes out in the blossom must be in the root. And so we say with certainty, that life, being constitutionally, even when unconsciously, ethical, is also Divine.

Does it not, then, seem to you that the Church ought to rest its faith in the Divine Sonship of the Christ on the manifest glory of His peerless ethical life, rather than on the inscrutable process by which it affirms that "the Word became flesh" in the womb?

In all reason, yes. It seems to me a most inconsequent bit of logic by which theologians assert that a specific physiological process—the miraculous conception of the Holy Child—is the necessary basis of such a spiritual fact as a life whose ethical glory is manifestly Divine. Mark you, I do not here dispute the miraculous conception. I only deny the necessity of it to constitute the

Christ the Son of God. The root of Christ's glory is, as its flower is, ethical, not physical, and what is ethical is fully as substantial a thing as what is physical. The usual theological argument is an utter *non sequitur*, and, as such, it works no small damage to Christian interests. As long as some men have doubts whether Divine power really wrought a miraculous conception, it is of vital interest to faith that they should see that the Divine-ness of Christ does not stand or fall with that. That the Word has become flesh was clear to the Evangelist who "*saw His glory, full of grace and truth.*" It is manifest to all who see the same in the moral perfectness of Christ. It does not in the least depend on *how* the Word became flesh, whether miraculously or naturally. To deny this is not only to defy all logic, but it is to blind men to the supernatural light which is in Christ.

Have we not come here to that topic which you brought up some time ago, but reserved for subsequent conversation—the false supernaturalism, of which you said that a true conception of the Trinity makes riddance of it?

We have, but not for the first time. We have come to it in point after point of our whole discussion. We came to it first in the Athanasian doctrine of the Eternal Sonship, in which we saw that

the revelation of God in some Form, or Word, is no intrusion into the established order of things, but a part of the order; that Divine self-expression is the Divine order. Again we came to it in our expanded view of the Incarnation, when we saw that the Incarnation of God is "no abnormal and isolated wonder"—whatever wonders be connected with it—but that it is the Everlasting Way of God to embody Himself, that is, His eternal life, His intelligence, His power, in successive forms of life, from rudimentary to perfect. We have now come to it again in our corrected view of the relation of the Son to the Father as moral and spiritual rather than miraculous; when we see that Christ's perfect Sonship to God is not constituted by a physiological process before birth in the flesh—though we do not deny the miracle—but by an ethical development, a process in the spirit.

I see perfectly well what a break we have made with those current ideas of the supernatural, which view it as an intrusion into nature of a power outside of nature, a break into the established order, a sort of amendment to the constitution of the world. But does not such an idea lurk in the very word supernatural—*super naturam*—"above nature?"

It does not lurk there unless you have first hid-

den it there by fancying that the word "above" means a position above, a place outside that order of constantly appearing and disappearing things which we call "nature"—a word which means all things that are born into being.

What, then, do you take the word "above" to mean?

I think it refers to the sovereign Power that is within nature. My idea of this power is that of Aristotle, who likened the process of nature to the work of a carpenter capable of fashioning timber from the inside. The supernatural is "above nature" simply as moulding and controlling nature. Is it not plain that one who objects to the supernatural as a power interfering with nature from outside of nature manufactures his difficulty by a mistaken definition?

Plain enough. This crude and fallacious definition seems to be from the same loom with that pagan notion of an outside God which you have often referred to as vitiating so much of current thinking.

It is so. And, on the contrary, the basis of all rational supernaturalism is in the Scriptural conception of the Living God, as not only the original Author of nature, but also its perpetual Inhabitant—nay, its Life, the all animating as well as all



transcending Power, who, as Holmes's noble hymn says, is

“Center and Soul of every sphere.”

I see the point which the whole Trinitarian conception secures. It is from God at the heart and center of things that the Power proceeds, which moulds and governs the ever rising and vanishing series of phenomena which we call the order of nature.

You have fairly put it. This is the only conception of the supernatural in which scientists and theologians can agree. And I have been struck by the fact that Aristotle's philosophic conception of the natural process is also Neander's theological conception of the supernatural process. Continually does this great historian of the church repeat the remark, that the Divine work goes on “from within outward.” In the phraseology which has come in since his day we describe God's processes as “evolutionary.” Exactly this is the true account of the supernatural. It is not an extraneous and interfering, but an internal and evolutionary control of nature. Of course, you see how our account of the Trinity leads directly to this account of the supernatural.

Indeed I do. When we do not have to look beyond the world or outside of ourselves to find

God, we do not have to look anywhere but to the heart of nature and of man to find the supernatural, the constant Power which shapes and vitalizes the changing forms.

True, and here you observe also how our conception of the Trinity informs our conception of the supernatural, as more than mere power—power perhaps unconscious and impersonal. It is intelligent, self-conscious, personal power, the power of "*the Living God*," immanent in the collective life and movement of the world, and individualized in the intuitions and aspirations of each separate spirit, so as to fulfill, "*through all and in all*," the Eternal Thought of the Father who is "*above all*." You see that it is on this Trinitarian idea of God that we can build the supernaturalism which is Christian and rational in place of that which is pagan and irrational.

You have made the point very clear, and I judge it to be your conviction that a variety of collisions between the schools of thought would be well ended, if men were only at one in the true Trinitarian idea of God.

That is just so. In fact, every one of the current questions at issue, whether between the men of science and the men of faith, or between parties in theological controversy, runs back into some

difference on the radical question of all thought, who, and what sort of being, is God? And no answer to this question is sufficient which falls short of the Scriptural idea of God, as involved in the Triune Name of God, as *The Father and The Son and The Holy Ghost*.

For illustration's sake I wish you would name some current controversy, where a false supernaturalism is the root of division, and then show me how a true Trinitarianism is the root of concord.

Well, there is the burning question, just now, of a Supernatural Revelation. Learned critics say there are some errors in the Scriptures, not important, but yet errors. Hereupon some theologians unwisely decry learning. Their idea of Supernatural Revelation is that it comes down from God above the world, and consequently must be free from error, or else it is not Revelation. Their mistake is in looking to the Father above the world, rather than to the Son and the Spirit within the world, as the immediate source of Revelation. God the Father is the original source of Holy Scripture, and of all things, but not the immediate source. If He were we should have the flawless Bible that some insist on. You see, I think, the point where this whole controversy about an inerrant Bible begins and ends.

I think I do. Your idea is, that Revelation is the unfolding of the life and the thought of God within the world.

Precisely. Revelation results from just that indwelling and outworking of the life and thought of God within the world which the Trinity represents to us. Our idea of the Trinity determines our idea of what a Supernatural Revelation is, not descending from above, but developing from within. With such an idea of it, no one is troubled by finding errors in the Scripture, any more than by finding imperfections in any physical work of God, as in the human eye.

Certainly not. Revelation by inward intuition of Divine truth, through the work of the Holy Spirit interpreting the life of the Son, will naturally be evolutionary and progressive.

Yes, and so various human crudities may be expected to adhere to it for a time, and later to fall away, as the teaching of the Spirit goes on. The whole process, you see, will be thoroughly natural in form, and yet supernatural, both in its working power and in its results, as a Divine Revelation. And the whole controversy, you also see, would be impossible, but for the crude conception of the Trinity as a Divine trio of "Persons" operating upon the world, or descending into it, from outside.

So it seems to me. Let me ask you here if we do not find a broader idea of Revelation, in general, involved in the broader idea of Incarnation and Divine Sonship which belongs to your idea of the Trinity.

Certainly. God everywhere immanent, and everywhere individualized, is everywhere expressive. And expression, as soon as recognized, becomes Revelation. So Paul says of the heathen : "*That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God manifested it unto them.*" And so, every work of God is a word of God, as the nineteenth Psalm says :

*" Their line is gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world."*

Every godly life is also a Revelation of God, as the proverb witnesses : "the church is the irreligious man's Bible." The wisdom of the pagan sages is composed of rays of "*the light that,*" as John said, "*lighteth every man.*" God had prophets among Gentiles as well as Jews. To admit all this derogates nothing from the supreme glory of Holy Scripture.

I judge, then, that you do not admit the distinction that many make between natural religion, as among heathen, and supernatural religion, as among Christians.

I do not. It is another bit of that false supernaturalism we have spoken of. All religion, so far as it is religious, is supernatural, if we use the word to signify the Power moulding nature from within. It was in the third century that Tertulian wrote, "The soul is naturally Christian." All men pray. And, as the poet says,

"Prayer is the breath of God in man,  
Returning whence it came."

All this is specially interesting to me. In one of our conversations you did me good by showing me what I had never dreamed of—the relation of the Trinity to the practical religious life. And now I am equally glad to discover how it determines the doctrines of Christianity. All this is so different from the common notion that the Trinity is an isolated mystery, and more of a strain on faith than a help either in conduct or in belief. You have good reason to call it, as you did, the truth of truths.

It is no less than that. You will find, as you think things through, that there is not a doctrine of Christian theology which is not determined for us, and in a way that often differs much from popular notions, by the doctrine of the Trinity in the expanded view we have taken of it. Men reject the Trinity because presented to them in a form all

too narrow, as having only one visible point of contact with the life of the world, in a single epoch, and in the single life of Christ. They will believe more of it as they see more of it. And such belief will carry other helpful beliefs along with it. In fact, you will here find Principal Fairbairn's remark not only thoroughly but happily true: "You may have a system of theology in a single doctrine."

If I am not taxing you, please lead me a little further in this line of thought.

Well, as we have been speaking of Supernatural Revelation, let us speak of Supernatural Grace. The majority of nominal Christians regard this as limited to a special form of church order, and to the ministrations of a special class of ordained persons, called clergy, as the exclusive channels of that grace to the world. Even in this nineteenth century, only a minority in Christendom hold a larger thought of it. The controversy still goes on, but slight progress is made by it.

No; the dispute over texts, such as, "*I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,*" really seems unprofitable. Where each contradicting interpretation claims to be the only correct one, who is to decide? And meantime outsiders have a show of reason in saying, We shall not join the

church till you have determined which is the church.

Well, then, in all such cases of barren controversy over texts, what one needs to find is some "master of sentences," some regulative principle of interpretation, as "the judge that ends the strife." Such an arbiter is the doctrine of the Trinity. The sacerdotal sense put upon those proof-texts, so called, which can prove nothing apart from their underlying principle, is decisively set aside by the Trinitarian principle, that God is immanent in all the social life and growth, and individualized in each personal conscience. This makes it clearly impossible that the flow of Divine quickening should be restricted to the channel of a single organization and a special class of men. What then should we have to think of the family as a channel of Divine grace, and of the influence of religious parents upon children too young to be ministered to by clergy? That notion of sacerdotalism is simply one of many sprouts from the pagan fallacy that God, secluded from the multitude like a king, deals with them from a distance by a class of ministerial agents.

In so saying do you side with those who, like the Plymouth Brethren, decry organized churches and ordained ministers?



Not at all. What is essential to the well-being of religion is to be distinguished from what is essential to its being. A church militant must be a church organized. An episcopal organization may, under certain social conditions, promote the well-being of religion better than any other. What is most efficient for religious life at any time is the way of God for that time. I only contend for the principle, "Where Christ is, there the church is." The Divine life in Christly men owns no boundaries of priestly prescription. Ecclesiastical organization and orders cannot limit the gracious communications of the everywhere indwelling and outworking God.

You have referred to the so-called proof-texts of controversionalists as requiring to have their true sense determined by some master truth like the Trinity. What seems to you the most important case of this sort?

To name one as important as any, I will instance the doctrine of the Atonement. What do you take to be the current idea of this?

This, in brief—an offended Deity who is placated by an equivalent of suffering endured by a substitute for the guilty, the release of whom makes it a necessity of government that there should be an exemplary exhibition of justice.

Well, is not this logically demonstrated out of the Bible as the proper view to take?

It seems to be. I have never been able to refute the argument for it that I often hear constructed from the proof-texts, and yet I am never convinced. It has seemed to me that there must be a fallacy, though I could not discover it.

The fallacy lies in that misconception of God which the Trinity protests against. It comes of regarding God as a Potentate external to His realm, who enacts and administers a statutory law external to the nature of His subjects. In the light of the Christian idea of God, which is given us by the Trinity, those dogmas about a governmental expedient for a legal quittance of the guilty lose all that semblance of reality with which a sensuous fancy invests them, and the proof-texts into which they have been smuggled by such a fancy will be found full of an ethical and spiritual teaching that is far more true.

There are a great many of those texts, but you might instance one for illustration.

Well, take those which speak of Christ as "*the propitiation for our sins.*" If this is made to point toward God in heaven, as requiring to be propitiated, the idea is abhorrent to Jesus' teaching in the parable of the father and the prodigal son. It

can only be accepted as pointing to God in the conscience. It means that Christ brings peace to the conscience, and satisfies the Divine demand which is felt therein.

I suppose we are too much given to using the altar language of the Biblical writers in a literal sense.

Yes, and the only adequate corrective is the Trinitarian conception of God as the Supreme Moral Power, who inhabits the inner world of thought and feeling, as he inhabits the outer world, and the highest heavens. In this view the Atonement of Christ, while indeed drawing its material and its imagery from the work of God in history, is not a reparation offered at a historical epoch to God on a heavenly throne, but rather to the Divine Spirit in the sinner's breast. It is in the penitent and praying heart that, as Paul says, "*the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*" And here the true Atonement of Christ is wrought, where groaning conscience in the purifying fellowship of Christ discharges its burden by repentance, and is at peace. Such an Atonement is not a governmental work outside of us, but an educational work within us. It is valid in heaven, because it is complete on earth. Of course, I have here

condensed much into a few words. The general principle is, that the Atonement, however mediated by historical incidents, is not an historical propitiation of God in space and time, but a spiritual process of God within the conscience. I will give you a little book in which you will find this conception thoroughly worked out.\*

If I might push inquiry but one point further, do you think that the problem of the future state is open to modification by your conception of the Trinity?

In this one point, certainly. The idea that the death of the body draws a line, beyond which God's saving grace is cut off from those who have till then resisted it, must be given up. This might square with the notion of God as operating from without. He is supposed to fix a time beyond which His offers expire. It is when you die, whether soon or late. But this arbitrary limit—twenty years to one, ninety to another, is utterly inconsistent with the conception of God the Spirit as the perpetual Inhabitant of conscience so long as conscience exists. It is the fact that God is in conscience, which makes redemption possible now. So long as God is in conscience redemption cannot

\* *The Divine Satisfaction*: a Review of what should, and should not, be thought about the Atonement.—T. Whittaker, New York. James Clarke & Co., London.

be impossible. But the awful possibility is not to be forgotten, that, in the incorrigible sinner, conscience may become extinct. Then, as Jesus said, "*If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !*"

Well, I agree with you that the popular notion of an outside God is the prolific mother of theological fallacies. And it is a rare service you have done me in showing me how to apply the principle which cuts them all up at the root. I see how true in the world of thought, as in the world of matter, are the words, "*In the beginning, GOD.*" Every step in Christian thinking depends on our thought of God. And to secure the Christian thought of God the Christian Name of God is given us in the Trinity.

Yes, that is exactly what Christ has told us in the words of His last prayer with the disciples : "*I have manifested Thy Name unto the men whom Thou gavest Me.*" Of course, He did not mean merely that He had named God to them, but rather, had given them a name of God which conveyed a true thought of God. The name He then had given them was simply the name of the Father ; true, but not complete. Later He completed it by the full announcement of the all comprehending Triune Name.

We hear much now about the present interest of Christian thinking as being Christological. Does that mean that Christ is the centre of it?

In one point of view, yes. All the lines of true thinking about God run back to Christ, as our source of true theology. But the ultimate centre of thought is for us, as it was for Christ, the transcendent God, the Father. He whom the Apostle calls, "*the effulgence of the Father's glory*," is to us as the mirror from which are flashed upon us the rays of the hidden luminary. Theology, as Principal Fairbairn says, must be on its historical side Christocentric, but on its doctrinal side theocentric.\* The thought of God which we get from Christ becomes the centre which determines the lines of our religious faith, our doctrinal belief, our moral effort, our social aim. And so our thought must be in its development Christocentric, in order to become in its ground and working theocentric, as Christ's thought was. And whatever, either in thought or practice, is not theocentric, will sometime break down and pass away.

I remember reading, years ago, of a famous sermon of Lyman Beecher's, which he began with this striking remark: "Jesus Christ is the acting Deity of the universe." That looks very Christo-

\* Address at the Congregational Council in London.

centric, but I suppose you would say it is very imperfectly and crudely so.

Yes ; and it fairly illustrates the recent remark of a Trinitarian reviewer, "the current orthodoxy is current heresy." In their ill-proportioned thought of the Trinity orthodox divines have made the Son overshadow the Father and the Spirit. It is a way they have of riding single texts so as to override the salient facts of the Scripture, in which Deity absolute always overshadows Deity revealed in form. Remarkable, indeed, is the Divine self-consciousness of Christ. Equally remarkable His Apostles' adoration of Him as above every other name in earth or heaven. But equally significant is it, that He joins with His Apostles in looking up to the infinite Father both as "*My God and your God*," over all, as well as through and in all. The oft recurring theocentric phrase of Scripture, which places Christ "*at the right hand of God*," shows how unbiblical is the orthodoxy which insists on ignoring the subordination of Christ to God. When the church comes at length out of the rudiments into the completeness of the Incarnation doctrine, it will be plain enough that God within the limits of form is a particular being, not to be confounded with God as the formless and universal Being.

But are there not texts which give plausible color to Dr. Beecher's statement? For instance, we read in Hebrews i: 2 and 3, "*By whom also He made the worlds ;*" and again, "*Upholding all things by the word of His power.*" This might be thought to carry the idea that Christ is both the Creator and Preserver of the universe.

Well, the Revisers have here, as in 1 Corinthians viii: 6, given another turn to the thought. You remember our discussion of that passage.\* Instead of "by whom" we now read "through whom," and explain it in this present as in that previous case. The Revisers also in the margin explain "the worlds" as "the ages." It is not the worlds of astronomy, but the worlds of human history, ancient and modern, that are meant. The thought is, that the Divine Life which was with the Father, and was manifest to us in the Christ, is immanent in the whole course of history as the quickening and organizing power of the successive periods of development which we term "the ages." What, then, does this require us to understand by the closely connected expression, "*Upholding all things by the word of His power?*" Evidently the context limits it to the course of the ages, "all things" in which are upheld—or as the word may

\* See page 57.



just as truly mean, carried on—by the Christ-Spirit immanent at the centre of the whole movement. In this sense we may recall Mrs. Stowe's line, already quoted :

"Thy piercéd Hand guides the mysterious Wheels."

Whatever more than this may be true of Christ's activity in other worlds than this planet, this text has nothing to say of it. And then you will notice how the passage goes on to speak of Him to whom it attributes all this, not as in the central seat of Divine control, but as "*on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*" To speak of Him as "the acting Deity of the universe," is merely a bit of careless rhetoric, and in such a subject carelessness is culpable.

So it strikes me. Christ constantly identified Himself with God, but He never confounded Himself with God. There was a distinction which He always reverently observed. It seems to me that His favorite affirmation, "*The Father is in Me,*" carries with it the implication, "*The Father is above Me.*"

Doubtless it does. This is the theocentric and truly Christocentric line of thought about the Trinity. And this line, I should say, must be drawn through these three points : (1) The eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, clearly recog-

nized in Scripture, though disallowed by an unbiblical dogmatism. (2) The eternal generation of the Son by the Father in perpetual incarnations or embodiments of the Uncreated and All-creating Life, idealized to us primordially in the *Logos*, or Word, and historically perfected in the Christ. (3) The relation of Christ to God as unique yet not abnormal, but the ideal of our relation to God in a Sonship essentially ethical, and constituted both for Him and for us by the communion of the Spirit. The first of these points secures us against Pantheism ; the second against Deism ; the third against the immoral tendency, observable in Protestants and still more in Romanists, of regarding Christ as a hopelessly inimitable ideal of Divine Sonship. Only as these points are held fast by Trinitarian thought can the rights of reason, the rights of conscience, and the rights of Christian fellowship be inviolably secured.

It is an inspiring outlook ; but do you think we are coming on to any such broad and high ground ?

I do, and, as I view it, with good reason. Principal Fairbairn tells us that theology is now, to a degree that would have been inconceivable a generation ago, "intensely Trinitarian." I cannot think this is due at all to a greater interest in the discussions that raged a century ago, when the

Unitarian schism occurred. It is due rather to a change of ground—the restoration of the Incarnation to its proper place as the focus of Christian thought, and to a fresh perception of its real significance when viewed through the Biblical truth of the Divine Immanence. The fact is, that we have been like Paul's "foolish Galatians," in bondage to the rudiments of a great truth, and are only now beginning to come into the realization of a glorious inheritance.

I suppose that the incident you referred to in our first conversation—your Unitarian friend confessing agreement with the Nicene Creed, as viewed from his spiritual standpoint—is fairly indicative of the change of view that comes with the change of ground you speak of.

It is ; and in degree as the idea of God, as ever immanent, and ever incarnating Himself—which is the centre of the Trinitarian conception—works in men's minds, we shall find not only the theological schism healing, but the chasm between faith and science filling up. The conception of the universe and of life which evolutionary science insists on finds its appropriate theological symbol in the Trinitarian doctrine of the Eternal Sonship. Likewise, the Supernatural energy, which the scientist fails to find outside of nature, is here discovered

hidden in the roots and vitals of nature, as the universal life that is affiliated to the Life of God. Men are beginning to see that the order and uniformity of nature are no less divine than the apparent breaks in it that are called miraculous. It is not a stagnant but a progressive order, and God in it is its Power for progress. The unhasting, un-resting, but increasing purpose which impels the ancient course of nature toward its far-off goal and ideal is nature's testimony to what is at the heart of nature ; it is nature's perpetual "*Gloria Patri.*"

I thank you for the suggestion of that noble chant. I shall never listen to it again without a profounder stir of soul. I used to think of it simply as a fine piece of music composed in honor of a mysterious Three on a far-off throne.

I, indeed, never weary of its repetition any more than of the Lord's Prayer. There is a sublimity in it as of the mountains of God :

"GLORY BE TO THE FATHER, AND TO THE SON, AND TO THE HOLY GHOST ;

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW, AND EVER SHALL BE, WORLD WITHOUT END, AMEN."

No incense-burning is here ; no distant salute. It is the comprehensive confession both of our faith and of our duty.

Pray tell me what thoughts in particular you fit

it to correspondently with your enlarged thought of the Trinity.

It reminds me that we give *glory to the Father* when we humbly devote ourselves to fill our allotted place with service to the Father ; when we take an interest in seeking the truth, that we may learn of the Father ; when we let our light shine in good works, that through our brotherhood others may come to the Father. We give *glory to the Son* when we honor the Divine rights of humanity, both by making the most of ourselves and by helping others to do the same, for the realization in us and in all of the life that is truly filial to God. We give *glory to the Holy Spirit* when we alike obey our own consciences and respect those of our neighbors, when we prefer the fellowship of a truth-seeking spirit to that of a truth-containing form, when we press on to find God in new forms as well as in old, and receive men to sympathy as broadly as God invites them.

How your words take hold of my conscience. This grand old chant draws heaven and earth into unison. It is not for church-service only, but for the daily path of plodding patience in well doing. It is an exhortation to ourselves to lead the life that the Trinity inspires, to live by the truth that the Trinity expresses. Its words are not in the

Scriptures, but they are the sum and substance of the Scriptures.

You have well said. Here is the sum of all Revelation, here the necessary object of all saving faith, here the simple rule of all human duty :—to know and to glorify God as **THE FATHER, AND THE SON, AND THE HOLY GHOST.**



## *EPILOGUE.*

By way of epilogue to the foregoing record of our conversations, it is fit to subjoin, with special reference to some practical bearings of the subject discussed, an extract from a letter written shortly after, while my friend was spending the winter of 1892 in California.

“In return for your favor in sending me the report of speeches by Dr. Abbott and others at the Unitarian Club, I enclose some clippings of a similar sort from the California papers. It is a sign of the times to find Boston and San Francisco simultaneously interested in our recent theme of discussion. As you see, the Trinitarian controversy has been running on in our papers for weeks. Your remark, that a fresh discussion of the old question was at hand, seems to have been prophetic.

“Mr. Cook’s strictures on Dr. Abbott’s position do little credit to his sagacity. When he says : ‘The attribute of self-existence causes God to differ



from man, not merely in quantity and quality of being, but in its inmost essence,' he strangely fails to see that moral nature cannot exist in us without having previously existed in God. Individually, of course, we are not self-existent, but we share in the moral nature which is, as belonging originally to God. As you used to insist, there cannot be two kinds of moral nature, divine and human, essentially different from each other, unless there are also two kinds of morality, likewise different.

"But our Californian debate convinces me more firmly of the truth of your remark, that the old line of Trinitarian argument can lead to nothing but a dead-lock. Each party scores some hits, and that is the end of it. If the thing aimed at in theological discussion is not victory, but harmony in the truth, the road to this, on the present subject, is on a higher level than has been hitherto taken. No agreement can be reached but through the larger conceptions of the Eternal Sonship and the Divine Incarnation which you showed me, and of the essential oneness of all spiritual nature, through which even our humanity partakes of what is infinite and divine.

"What seems to me the thing now to be insisted on, as of supreme importance to all who look beyond controversy to agreement in the truth, is

this : The dividing line to be drawn to-day is not a horizontal one, but a vertical. We need less regard to the superficial distinction between denominational names, and more regard to the profounder distinction between spiritual men and unspiritual, both of which classes are found in varying proportions in all the denominations. The time is ripe for making a better distinction than has yet been made between those who hold and those who do not hold, in the central place, the truth, so vital to spiritual life, of a Divine Incarnation which is in reality the manifestation in very man of very God.

“ Now as to this, so competent a witness as Dr. A. P. Peabody says, that very many Unitarians regard the Incarnation, in the most obvious sense of the term, as the central truth of Christianity. Yet among Trinitarians many do not so regard it. They put in the central place the Divine Sovereignty, or the Atonement. Then, consistently enough, they tell us that Christianity is essentially not a life, but a dogma. And of these a very large number, nominally believing in the Incarnation, really believe in something else than what the Scriptures present as the fact. God in flesh is their notion of it, rather than God in man. What they see in Christ is a divinity so superior to hu-



## *EPILOGUE.*

By way of epilogue to the foregoing record of our conversations, it is fit to subjoin, with special reference to some practical bearings of the subject discussed, an extract from a letter written shortly after, while my friend was spending the winter of 1892 in California.

“In return for your favor in sending me the report of speeches by Dr. Abbott and others at the Unitarian Club, I enclose some clippings of a similar sort from the California papers. It is a sign of the times to find Boston and San Francisco simultaneously interested in our recent theme of discussion. As you see, the Trinitarian controversy has been running on in our papers for weeks. Your remark, that a fresh discussion of the old question was at hand, seems to have been prophetic.

“Mr. Cook’s strictures on Dr. Abbott’s position do little credit to his sagacity. When he says: ‘The attribute of self-existence causes God to differ

from man, not merely in quantity and quality of being, but in its inmost essence,' he strangely fails to see that moral nature cannot exist in us without having previously existed in God. Individually, of course, we are not self-existent, but we share in the moral nature which is, as belonging originally to God. As you used to insist, there cannot be two kinds of moral nature, divine and human, essentially different from each other, unless there are also two kinds of morality, likewise different.

"But our Californian debate convinces me more firmly of the truth of your remark, that the old line of Trinitarian argument can lead to nothing but a dead-lock. Each party scores some hits, and that is the end of it. If the thing aimed at in theological discussion is not victory, but harmony in the truth, the road to this, on the present subject, is on a higher level than has been hitherto taken. No agreement can be reached but through the larger conceptions of the Eternal Sonship and the Divine Incarnation which you showed me, and of the essential oneness of all spiritual nature, through which even our humanity partakes of what is infinite and divine.

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man limits of knowledge and power, that He retains little more than the form and semblance of humanity, instead of the real and thorough manhood which is indispensable to the moral need we have of Him.

“ You see I have been doing some thinking on the line you marked out. I have discovered this at least, that ‘ Unitarian ’ is as ambiguous a term as ‘ Protestant,’ and I might say the same of ‘ Trinitarian.’ These names, often used as mere party cries, serve as a mischievous blind to a just and helpful discrimination. Speaking now of Unitarians, candid observers cannot fail to see that there are two very unlike sorts. The practical interest of the one sort is the same as ours—to lift men up to Christ’s divine level. The other sort seem more intent on letting Christ down to reduced human measures. With these I do not see what we can have in common. The vital question now at issue really, as it always has been at least nominally, is whether we recognize in Jesus man only, or God in man, nor this merely, but the utmost of God that can be manifested in man.

“ Dr. Peabody tells us that this last is the view actually held by the majority of Unitarians. If this be so, as doubtless it is, why should any, who agree with them in this essential point, shut them

out on points of speculation as to how God came to be thus manifest in man, or as to whether it is the second or the third Person in the Trinity, the Eternal Word or the Eternal Spirit, which constitutes the God in Christ, or as to whether it is the Divine Essence, or the Divine Power, which is incarnate in Him, or on the nice distinction which Mr. Cook finds between God incarnate and God indwelling? The medieval schoolmen, who took time to dispute on such subjects as the excrements of angels, might here see a field for intellectual finesse and division. But for Christians facing the gigantic antichrist of modern secularism to waste their force by division on such points seems to me sheer treason to the practical interests of Christ.

“Must we not conclude that the best service to the truth, and to the charity apart from which truth is dead, is that all spiritual men, all earnest believers in a redemptive Incarnation, however they explain it, should seek to close with each other as nearly as they can? We need not doubt that in the warmth of spiritual affinities dogmatic oppositions will melt into their proper dimensions. The more men pray and work together for the kingdom of God, the sooner will they come to think together in a good mutual understanding.



The pressing need to-day is to cast out the devils which infest Christendom, and to get the will of God better done on earth. Christ took into His fellowship, and we ought not to exclude from ours, all who were ready to co-operate with Him in this. ‘*Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.*’

“When Christians are ready to ‘come to Christ’ in this, and to substitute His spiritual conditions of brotherhood for the dogmatic conditions which they have set up, it will be the beginning of the end of their doing the work of antichrist by wasteful division of Christian forces. Just as the opposite sides of an arch impart stability and strength to each other when united at the top, so when spiritual men of divers ways of thinking draw together in their common loyalty to the law of Christ, the various elements of truth they have severally held apart in exclusiveness will become their common heritage for their augmented power. Our fractional Christianity sadly needs to be integrated. We must rise above dogma into spirit and life. We can come together only at the top.”

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