The Trinity and the Incarnation

RICHARD A. ARMSTRONG

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INTRODUCTORY.

MOST of those who profess and call themselves Christians, both in this country and in the rest of the world, are in the habit of saying that Jesus Christ is God. This is the current opinion; it is taught by the Church; it is laid down in the Creeds. But if you come to examine the average Englishman, you will find that he holds this opinion in rather a vague and loose sort of way. He has not thought out exactly what he means by it, nor considered just what it involves. If you asked him whether God is our Heavenly Father, he would almost certainly answer 'Yes.' If you then asked,

'Well, then, is Jesus Christ our Heavenly Father?' he would certainly say 'No.' But if you went on, 'Are there, then, two Gods?' he would entirely repudiate the suggestion. So that he carries about with him in his mind these four propositions:—(1.) 'Jesus Christ is God'; (2.) 'God is our Heavenly Father'; (3.) 'Jesus Christ is not our Heavenly Father'; (4.) 'There are not two Gods.' Yet he has never considered how to reconcile these four separate opinions of his together; it probably has not occurred to him that they are inconsistent with one another. His teachers have various methods of harmonising the four opinions, all four of which have been taught to him by them—methods satisfactory or unsatisfactory. But the average Englishman has not troubled himself with the matter.

Broadly speaking, we may lay it down that his teachers try to harmonise the four opinions by what is known as *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*. That doctrine is held in a vast number of different forms; but in some form or other it is advanced as the solution of the difficulty in which we find

ourselves with the four opinions which we are taught that we ought to hold all together concerning Jesus Christ and God and our Heavenly Father. And in its widest form the Doctrine of the Incarnation is this: that God was in Jesus Christ, so that Jesus Christ, though remaining Man, was also God. This does not seem to some of us to smooth away the difficulty; and we still incline to think that the four propositions we have spoken of as held by the average Englishman are mutually incompatible. But this, or something like this, is put forward by the theologians of the ordinary type as the explanation.

Perhaps if we could look inside the mind of the ordinary Christian, we should find that the reason that he is not practically troubled by the apparent incompatibility of the four propositions is that he never actively thinks them all at the same moment,—that when he is thinking of Jesus Christ as being God, he is not at the moment thinking of God as our Heavenly Father, and that when he is thinking of God as being our Heavenly Father, he is

not at the moment thinking of Jesus Christ as being God.

However that may be, this book is to be a book about the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, and especially of the Incarnation—a doctrine which has played an immense part in the history of religion, and still does so: a doctrine which has drawn to itself the passionate enthusiasm and devotion of millions of Christian hearts. This doctrine is our chief theme. We are to try to understand what it means, and to consider as deeply as we can whether it is true or untrue, well knowing that, since truth is simply God's own thought, the truth regarding any doctrine, whether confirming or destroying it, must be the best and holiest for us to hold. We are, then, to weigh this doctrine, so widely and earnestly held, in the balance, desiring only to draw as near as may be to the actual truth of God, which must be the best and holiest for the mind of man to hold.

But every doctrine, every opinion, has its history. The thought which it expresses has grown out of previous thought. And there

is no doctrine ever held by man of which this is more true than the doctrine of the Incarnation. It took long to shape itself in its fulness. It slowly grew from its germ. Its history is the history of an evolution. The earlier sections of this book will be an attempt, very briefly and very broadly, but I hope lucidly and accurately, to describe the growth and development of the Doctrine of the Incarnation.

Only let it not for a moment be supposed that I pretend, even so far as the limits of my scanty space permit, to follow out the growth and development of the doctrine in all its twists and turns. Multitudes of minds brought their several contributions to the evolution before the doctrine was finally crystallised in permanent form as an asset of orthodox Christianity. Names and schools that played a great part in the history in their day will necessarily be passed by unmentioned here. Indeed, for our purpose, even were I competent to set forth their teachings, they would perhaps only produce confusion. We shall treat of the process of the growth

of the doctrine of the Incarnation only so far as seems necessary to explain the part it plays in the practical religion of men of our own time. Such as desire to trace the process in fuller detail must turn to other books,—for a general view, let us say to Dr. Réville's 'History of the Dogma of the Deity of Jesus Christ,' or, for a more minute account, to Professor Harnack's great and famous 'History of Dogma,' especially the third and fourth volumes of the English translation.

With this proviso, let us proceed to our initial task.

PART I.

THE GROWTH OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

I. THE WORLD IN THE FIRST CENTURY.

IN the first half of what has since come to be called the first century of the Christian era, the intellectual and religious world was in a state of chaos. The great civil and military system of Rome had grasped all the more significant races of mankind in its hold. But there lived on, under that outward system, the inner world of thought; and that still was dominated by the mind of Greece. The body of Athens was in chains, but still her immortal soul was free, and the mighty thinkers of her vanished age of pride

still ruled the thoughts of men. Yet many causes had conspired to bring about a period of devastating scepticism. The old mythological religion of Greece was dead; and though there still ran through cultivated society the golden thread that sprang from the brain of Plato, speculation had lost its virility and was enfeebled by endless wandering subtleties. Men to whom it was more necessary to have some doctrine to *live* by than to possess a refined philosophy, either, if made of the sterner stuff, found their refuge in some type of Stoicism with its courageous, disillusioned resignation, or, if of more emotional turn, lent an ear to teachers from Egypt or the East who had mystic cults of Mithras, of Isis, of Serapis to propound, which promised to save men's souls from the dissatisfaction of life, but mostly through corrupt and debasing practices.

Only in one small territory, on the border line between the Eastern and Western hemispheres of the Imperial dominion, there was a peculiar people still steadfastly tenacious of a faith evolved from ancient days, in which it

had gradually differentiated itself from the religions of the tribes around, first by claiming that its God found pleasure only in the righteousness of men, and then by claiming that he was rightful God, not of a few clans alone, but God and Creator of the whole world and of the heavens, with their sparkling gems, which he had spread over it as the covering of a tent. Only indeed by crushing, in no small measure, the old free and living nature of that national faith, and fastening it to innumerable legal exactions smothering its spirit with a most punctilious ritual, had the national leaders preserved that historic faith amid the welter of religious wreckage all around. But they had succeeded in preserving it; and while the religions of Rome and Hellas were gone to wrack and ruin, that little community which traced its lineage back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had in full integrity in its keeping a faith which declared one sole everlasting and living God whose favour could be won by righteousness—a somewhat narrow, rigid, and rule-of-thumb righteousness, but still by righteousness—and by righteousness alone.

II. THE HISTORIC JESUS.

Among this peculiar people some nineteen centuries ago was born one Jesus. The records we possess of him are most scanty and incomplete. They are undoubtedly vitiated by many flaws inevitable among a people who had no notion of historical or biographical accuracy. It is easy to show that they constantly contradict each other and expose to every student their own many inconsistencies. Nevertheless, we hold them precious beyond all other literature in the world because they give us the only accounts, the only picture, we possess of one whose influence has dominated human history, and by whose thought and life the thought and life of every one of us is modified at every moment of every day.

It is a temptation to linger over the figure of Jesus, but we must be content to try to set it forth in half a dozen sentences. A man certainly gifted in an extraordinary degree with the finest characteristics of his race—of a rare mould intellectually and morally. A man with a most singular balance of tender-

ness and power, an almost unique blend of the most beautiful characteristics of a woman and the most noble characteristics of a man, and so baffling all down the centuries all painters who have set themselves to his ideal portraiture. A man, too, in whom the habitual cheerfulness of a pure and wholesome nature was often shot through with a yearning and pathetic sadness, so that historians are drawn into divided ranks according as they count him a man of sorrows or a man of joy. Undoubtedly in his measure both, but always with rebound from the mood of grief to the glad and sunny temper which was fostered by the faith that was in him, an exhaustless well of life. And beyond all, a man of steadfast, consecrated will, with a purpose which never left him for a moment, from the day on which he first heard the call of God to the day when they slew him because they hated the splendour of his love.

And there in his little land, mostly among the towns and villages of its northern province, he delivered the message that was in him. There are many ways of reading that

message. We have it only in fragments,—vivid stories, epigrams, comments on passing incidents,—and broken and mixed up certainly with much that he never really said, but which others afterwards thought that he had said, how much we cannot tell. But there seems to be a clear kernel of wheat among the chaff, the sheen of the true gold among the encompassing sand; and whatever is clearly too original, too beautiful, too purely and sublimely spiritual to have been imagined by the reporters, or those who handed down the tradition to the ultimate reporters, we may be sure is really his own thought and message, the word of creative life welling forth from his religious genius. And it strikes us, first, that, whereas the other teachers of his time and place made the obedience which God demands the obedience of subjection, he made it the obedience of a willing love. In other words, his gospel discarded the dispensation of the law, and rested on inward grace,—not the grace of the creeds, but the free and loving turning of the heart to God, the Heavenly Father. For, secondly, fore-

most and central in his teaching is it that we are not to think of God as the hard task-master, but as the loving Father; and every glimpse we get of the man himself is that of a man to whom that conception of God was no mere theory or doctrine, but the very central core of consciousness, a fact for ever present in his heart, a living experience of every day and hour, a truth and experience illuminating and dominating life, a relation the very closest and most certain of the inmost soul.

He felt with thrilling and constant conviction that God was the Father, Father to him, a son of man, and in like fashion to every son of man born into the world. Through that he felt his own brotherhood to all men and the brotherhood of all men to one another. In every human being he saw the child of the Heavenly Father, and he knew that the Father loved every human being with a perfect Father's love. That was the first and central message he had to give. It thrilled in his speech; it was stamped on his face; it lived in his soul.

All else that he taught flowed from it as its primal source and spring.

We must hold fast by that as a golden thread through all the mazy path which we must tread. That was the beginning —a man certain by the energy of the soul's experience that God is our Heavenly Father, that all men are children of God, that the one true bond between God and man is mutual love.

All sound literary criticism brings out that as the foundation fact preserved in the Gospels that are in our hands, at any rate in those commonly known by the names of *Matthew* and *Mark* and *Luke*.

But this man lived in a particular time and place, and this wonderful gospel that was in his heart had to take its chance among the prejudices, ignorances, current opinions, prepossessions, mental and moral limitations, superstitions, traditions, passions and bigotries of the time and place in which he lived. He just sowed the seed of his word. He just left the impression of his character and personality. And then his hour came, and his word and

his memory were left to the insecure custody of the society in which he had moved, the circle whom he had influenced, and after them the generations that succeeded.

III. THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS.

And the first documents which we possess purporting to give an account of his life and teaching were not written till many decades after his earthly career had closed,—that is, in their present form. Critics differ as to their exact date. It is, for our purpose, of no great matter whether one of them reached its final form some thirty or forty years after his death as the most conservative critics think, or whether, as other scholars believe, none of them reached its final form till after the opening of the second century. At any rate as they stand they are not contemporary records, and there is no evidence that a line of them was written within a generation of the crucifixion. For long years it is certain that the memory of the life and word of Jesus was left to the floating tradition of mouth to mouth communication. In the existing

Gospels there are evidences of gradual modification and enlargement as the manuscripts were copied by scribe after scribe. There are clear layers of stratification; and they are as composite and as various as the rocks that form the crust of our earth. The science of the critic consists in determining and separating the successive deposits and in placing them in their time-order. For the layers are not superimposed each upon the preceding, but the contributions of the successive generations are inextricably mingled, as though our rock had been fused in some cataclysmic convulsion, and fragments of sundry eras had been thrown together in medley and disorder.

Now there is one clue which goes far to determine scholars in their investigation. It is obvious that the more natural and simple the account of Jesus in any passage, the older and more authentic it must be, the nearer to the facts of the actual historic Jesus; while the more abundant is the marvellous and supernatural, the further removed is the passage from the actual fact. For a

story never grows less wonderful with age; or rather the further the story from its original, the more the purely moral and spiritual marvel is overlaid with the miraculous, the abnormal, the marvel that owes its origin to the undisciplined imagination of the teller. And in these Gospels we are able thus to trace successive encroachments of the supernatural on the pure and simple picture of the man Jesus as we catch glimpses of him moving in his superb and natural manhood among the phantoms of the later imagination.

The earliest elements of the first three Gospels—known as the Synoptics—present us with the man Jesus even as I have already sketched him, but with extraordinary miraculous powers often wielded, and with claims to be no other than that Messiah so long expected by the Jews. That the real Jesus had those strange powers of healing certain diseases which we meet with from time to time in many men in history is more than probable, though there are indications that he used them reluctantly and dreaded lest

they should overshadow his moral and religious message. But it is reasonable to think that the more striking prodigies ascribed to him belong to the exaggerating tendencies of after imagination. Whether, again, Jesus actually believed and proclaimed himself to be the promised Messiah of his people, critics are not agreed, though the preponderant opinion is that he did, in a very different sense, however, from the popular expectation. But it is not easy for those of us who reverence him for his spiritual insight and his instinct for the spiritually beautiful to believe that he really proclaimed that he should return to earth on clouds of glory. If he did, he was certainly deceived, as is proved by the event. And one would rather surely believe that this was the first stage of the idealising movement in men's minds which was, with ever increasing potency, to remove the Christ of the Church further and further from the actual Jesus of fact and history.

'The first stage,' I say, 'of the idealising movement in men's minds.' For the story to be told in the beginning of this book is the

story of the gradual idealisation which, as the original impression of the man Jesus faded from memory, by a natural psychological process substituted by degrees for the historic man of Nazareth, a completely superhuman figure and at last the Incarnate God himself.

One of the first stages in this long process was the laborious effort to prove that Jesus, through his father Joseph, was directly descended from King David, which you will find in *Matthew* and in *Luke*, though the two genealogies contradict each other, the one tracing the tree through David's son Solomon, the other through Nathan, a less famous son.

But the most startling stride within the three Synoptic Gospels themselves in the idealising process, a stride which almost lands us in the full doctrine of Incarnation itself, is contained in the narratives of the virgin birth. Misled by a false interpretation of a passage of Isaiah which really refers to the birth of a child in the prophet's own time, and especially of the word for a young woman which was erroneonsly supposed to mean a virgin, some of the early Christians

supposed that it was necessary to back the doctrine of the Messiahship of Jesus by regarding him as supernaturally born,—and further than that, that not only had he no earthly father, but that the Holy Ghost himself was his father. Let us note in passing that another Gospel—now lost to us—varies the myth by teaching that the Holy Ghost was not the father, but the mother. Such legends naturally and easily came into being in response to the need felt in the hearts of men. They were put forth quite ingenuously without any thought of fraud or desire to deceive. There is abundant evidence, both historical and psychological, in the records of all the great historical religions, that myths never fail to spring up in response to the instinctive impulse in the desire of men's hearts. Yet scientific criticism detects at once that such narratives are an afterthought, and have no roots in sober history. If the writers who inserted the genealogies of Joseph in these two Gospels wanted to show that Jesus through him could claim direct descent from David, they at any rate

cannot have believed that he was not Joseph's son at all. Neither Mark nor John knows anything of the story of the virgin-birth. Even in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke it is never alluded to again, and the whole course of their narratives pre-supposes that Jesus was born at Nazareth, that Joseph was his father, and that neither his family nor his neighbours nor any one else had ever heard of his having been born in any extraordinary manner or with such accompaniments as the singing of the heavenly host or the advent of wise men from the East guided by a moving star.

IV. THE PAULINE CHRIST.

But we must pass on from these simple Gospels with their wonderful glimpses of that gracious figure moving through the fields of Galilee and the streets and squares of Jerusalem, with the story drawing so swiftly to its pathetic close, with their ready tales of marvel, with their easy acceptance even of prodigies akin to those told hundreds of years before concerning the birth of Gautama, the

great redeemer of the suffering hordes of India,—pass on to another group of documents within the New Testament wherein the process leading on towards the full doctrine of the Incarnation is taken up at a different point and carried further forward.

In my student days the more advanced scholars taught us that the Epistles to the Romans, to the Corinthians, and to the Galations were undoubtedly straight from the hand of Paul, while all the other letters bearing his name were more or less doubtful. To-day most scholars are inclined to restore to Paul a much larger proportion of the Epistles bearing his superscription, though others of high authority, especially in Holland, are disposed to dissolve almost all the Epistles into very composite documents, and to allow to Paul only an uncertain share in them, seeing in them rather a literature which gradually grew up among those Christians who looked back to him as their chief master and instructor.

The story and character of Paul are a fascinating theme of study over which it is

impossible for us to linger. The first point for us to note in considering the part he played in preparing the way for the full doctrine of the Incarnation is that he never saw Jesus upon earth, cared nothing for the details of his life and words, immediately on his conversion went into retirement for three years, never saw one of the Apostles till the end of these three years, when he saw Peter and James, and never met the rest till half a generation after. His conceptions of the Master were the results of his own reflections, unaided and unhampered by any knowledge of the actual Jesus of the Galilean fields or the beach about Gennessareth. The second point to be borne in mind is that his conversion — whatever its actual circumstances and nature—was a sudden revolution changing him from the sternest persecutor to the most enthusiastic preacher of the Christ, and that all his reflections were coloured by the ecstasy of his new sense of peace and enlargement and reconciliation with God. He was, no doubt, a man with a powerful intellectual life; but much more he was a man of

passionate religious emotion—a man apt to be carried away in ecstatic visions, rapt exaltations, whether in the body or out of the body he himself could not tell. Now such a temperament arms a preacher with burning words, equips a missionary with splendid and indomitable zeal, but rather militates against that calm, dry light of reason in which deep problems of philosophy must be thought out. Paul flung himself again and again into doctrinal dissertations. But they were simply so many attempts to express in intellectual form what were in reality the fervent experiences of his own personal emotions—and such experiences are not easily drilled into intellectual consistency. It would therefore be folly to expect—what, however, the whole of orthodox Christendom has expected—to find in him the materials for a sound and self-consistent doctrine of the nature and person of Jesus Christ.

It is, then, in such magnificent and incomparable passages as the great eulogy of charity or love rather than in his laboriously reasoned doctrinal dissertations that we find

the true greatness of the Apostle of the Gentiles. But, not the less, are his doctrinal conceptions of interest. His doctrine of Christ had first of all to express his own sense of spiritual renovation by what he believed to be actual communion with the living and risen Lord, and secondly his passionate persuasion that Christ had the like renovation not for the Jew alone, but for men of every blood and nation. To him then Christ could not be the mere Messiah which he was to the original Apostles, and who was later on to be set before the Church by the Synoptic Gospels. He was the universal Man, far exalted above nationality or race. Nor could he be the mere sojourner for a few years in Palestine. Paul's own experiences came to him, he felt, from no being robed in flesh, but from a spirit condescending to him from the unseen heaven. And so the scale in time of this Man expanded, and he became the universal Man, who, as he was *now* with God in the transcendent world, had dwelt there also in the unfathomed æons of the past. He was the typical Man, the second and holier Adam,

untouched with sin, whose tabernacling for a few short years in flesh had been a condescension to which he had been moved by an infinite compassion, and which had its only meaning and only purpose in the tremendous drama of the crucifixion and the resurrection. And so, without pretending to discriminate with precision between expressions in the group of the Pauline letters which are the direct expressions of Paul himself, and others which are but the fruit of the line of thought which he set going among his followers, we understand how it comes to be taught in those letters that Christ is the celestial Man, the Man from heaven, destined from the depths of eternity for human redemption, who being rich, for our sakes became poor, who being in the image of God (it is never represented that he *was* God, but only the image of God) counted it not a thing to be grasped at to be equal with God, but emptied himself, accepting the fleshly likeness of men, and humbled himself to the death of the Cross. But now had God given him great exaltation, that every

tongue should call him Lord. Soon, even in the life of men then living, should he once more descend from heaven, with a shout and the voice of the arch-angel. Under him should all things be put, until all should be fulfilled, when he should render back the kingdom to God; and thenceforth should the Son himself be subjected to him, that God might be all in all.

How far away we have already got from the Jesus who moved among the simple folk of Galilee, whose interest was in breaking up the cramping bonds of the Jewish law to draw the people round him into the love of the Heavenly Father, who sighed that he had not where to lay his head, who drew the little children to his knee, who loved to rest in the little parlour at Bethany, after the weary day, with Mary sitting at his feet, who in the Garden besought God, if it might be, to spare him the agony of the Cross, who as the life ebbed out, overwhelmed with human weakness, cried, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'—who with the last breath with recovered trust commended his

spirit to his Father! How very far, under the guidance of Paul and his school, have we got away from that historic Son of Man with his simple Gospel of trust and love! And yet how far we still have to go before we approach that full doctrine of the Incarnation professed by the whole of orthodox Christendom. The Christ of Paul was the Man from Heaven, the Second or Spiritual Man, the pre-ordained Agent of the Father in the redemption of mankind—but still essentially a Man, never thought of as himself the supreme God, but as divided by immeasurable distance from the God who was and ever shall be all in all.

Broadly speaking, in the Synoptic Gospels we have Jesus construed into the Jewish ideal or Messiah; that was the thought worked out by the actual friends and companions of Jesus and their immediate successors. In the Pauline letters, on the other hand, we have him construed into the great architypal Man, the spiritual Adam, the Man from Heaven. Both looked for his speedy return to carry through a drama upon earth far ex-

ceeding that of his first appearance among the sons of Israel. But still within the limits of the New Testament there was to rise yet another and still more exalted presentation of this Son of God as the Incarnate Word. So we must next turn to the splendid pages of the Fourth Gospel; and see how the exaltation was carried on, new tributaries of thought swelling the forces already working in men's minds, from sources far outside the limits of Israelitish ideas, namely, the august intellect of Greece itself.

The *Synoptic* Jesus was conceived in the ancient mould of Jewish sentiment and tradition. The Christ of *Paul* was conceived in the mould of a broadened and liberated Judaism which claimed the human race as its rightful heritage. The Christ of the *Gospel according to St. John* was conceived as one in whom the eternal Word became flesh, by processes of thought as remote from the ideas of Paul as those of Paul were from those of the first biographers of Jesus.

V. THE CHRIST OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

To sum up: we have now briefly reviewed the beautiful glimpses of the person and character of Jesus of Nazareth still to be traced in the pages of the Synoptic Gospels. We have seen his simple and inspiring teaching that God is our Father, and that therefore we are all brothers and sisters, and his earnest pleadings with those who gathered round him to trust and love the Father and always pray to him as their one supreme and perfect friend. And we have seen these things gradually overlaid, even in the Synoptics themselves, with the attribution of boundless miraculous gifts, and even at last with stories of his miraculous birth with the Holy Ghost for his father. We have seen Paul and his followers, who had never known this Jesus in the flesh, letting go, as of no interest or value, all the beautiful unfolding of his character and the incidents of his life, and concentrating themselves on his crucifixion and resurrection. We have seen how they declared him to be the Man from Heaven, the spiritual Adam, the typical Man, who dwelt now, and through

past ages had dwelt, with God in the transcendental world, God's viceregent to rule the world by divine commission till all things should be fulfilled, and at last he should restore the kingdom to God that God should be all in all.

And now we are to see a still more overwhelming exaltation ascribed to him who had once been thought of as a human child growing slowly from his innocent childhood in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.

It is already, so declare the great mass of truest and profoundest scholars, at any rate not before the early years of the second century, that a new Christian manuscript begins to be passed from hand to hand, and copied and carried from city to city, originating probably in the great commercial city of Ephesus, where Greeks and Jews met in busy traffic both of wares and of pregnant thoughts,—Ephesus where Paul was said to have made so great a commotion round about the temple of Diana long ago. And this new manuscript began

with a passage importing a whole new world of thought into the Christian idea, destined profoundly to modify the whole Christian conception to this very day in which we live.

Where did the new thought come from, and what was its scope and drift?

It came to be believed that this new and magnificent version of the Gospel story was from the hand of no other than the Apostle John, one of those two brothers whom Jesus is said to have surnamed 'Sons of Thunder'; and perhaps the author wished that this should be believed. But it seems impossible to maintain his authorship; and there are almost overwhelming reasons for ascribing it to some other writer, perhaps one known in the Church as John the Elder, himself a man of high and honourable repute.

But whence came the new thought here sent forth to penetrate the Church whether by John the Apostle or John the Elder or some other, and what are its scope and drift?

Already there was in Greek philosophy a conception having its earliest germ as far

back as Heraclitus in the very beginnings of Greek thinking, but gathering clearness and consistency through many centuries and notably through the schools of Plato, that the visible universe was not the direct creation of the one absolute and unapproachable God, but was made and continued by the Thought of God or the Reason of God, itself conceived as an emanation from, or even a Son of, God,—for Greek thinking could not tolerate the idea of the absolute God coming into direct contact with material nature. And, especially in Alexandria, about the time of Jesus, this *Greek* way of thinking met the *Jewish* way of thinking of 'Wisdom' as a sort of semi-personal being—conceived, however, as feminine—dwelling with God and enlightening the minds of men. So that it was now quite a dominating conception both in Greek and in some Jewish circles that, nearer to men than the absolute God, the ineffable, the Father, there was a being, or a person, or an essence, for which the term 'Logos' was the appropriate name, who was the Thought by which the world was

framed and which imparted itself to the minds of men.

And the fourth Evangelist, whoever he actually was, was filled with this conception. It ruled and shaped his intellectual life. It seemed to him an axiom of all true thinking.

The Logos, then, which may be more or less accurately translated into English as the Reason, or the Word, or perhaps best of all as the Thought, of God, was energy issuing from the abysmal depths of God, and hovering around and passing through all the natural world and the souls of men, the source and basis of their life and being. So thought the unknown writer who sent forth his wonderful manuscript from Ephesus or its neighbourhood somewhere in the first forty years of the second century of the Christian era.

But this wonderful man was not only a philosopher. He was one kindled with the energies of vivid and vital religion—one who had been moved to that intense sense of divine love which has been the moving force in all the great masters of spiritual truth. And he knew and felt that this illumination

and uplifting had come to him through that Jesus who had arisen a hundred years ago among the Jews. Of the earthly life of this Jesus he had some written record, I doubt not, and many reminiscences of him, or quasi-reminiscences of him, floated around him borne from mouth to mouth, though both record and tradition differed widely from those on which elsewhere the three earlier Gospels in our canon were built up. Widely?—nay, often quite irreconcilably. And they seemed to him, I suppose, not so much the material for a careful biography, for that was not his motive, as the material into which might be poured a new and ideal presentation of the person and career of their wondrous subject.

And pondering these things,—both the mystic Logos philosophy and also the moving and mastering personality of the Jesus who had so profoundly touched his soul,—there came to him, whether by long and laborious thinking or by the sudden flash of rapturous imagination, a sublime conception which drew together into one luminous centre the two foci

of his *thinking* and his *emotion*, and so rounded out the perfect circle of his pondering. It seemed to him that that divine Thought which had for ever been emanating from God and which had bathed the world and man through all time in its vague, intangible light, had, at a certain moment in the ripeness of days, been poured in full and perfect concentration into the Man Jesus, tabernacled in his earthly flesh, given to him the wisdom and holiness of God; that from that lamp the spirits of all men might be illumined; and then, having spoken in him, the Man Jesus, withdrawn once more to the bosom of God. And stirred with the thrill of this vision he sat down and wrote :—

'In the beginning was Thought, and Thought was with God, and Thought was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Thought. In Thought was life; and that life was the light of men. There was the true light coming into the world which lights every man. It was in the world, and the world came into being through it, but the

world did not recognise it. . . . But then Thought became flesh and entered, as it were, into a tent of flesh among us. And we saw the gloriousness of him, gloriousness as of an only begotten one from God, full of grace and truth. . . . God no man ever saw. The only begotten son, he who was in the bosom of the Father, he interpreted.'

I have abridged and modified and re-translated; but I believe that I have accurately set forth the essence of this supreme passage in the great march onward towards the doctrine of the Incarnation.

How sublime, how transcendent a conception! The Eternal Thought, the emanation of the Supreme God, concentrated into one atom of space, one moment of time, and poured into one human being, lighting his eyes, speaking in his voice, beating at his heart—as though all the eternal sunshine in the highest heavens were distilled into a single lamp, and shone from one lantern upon the world! And the whole Gospel that follows is conceived on these superb lines. Yes, it is human flesh, a human voice,

a human face and hand, a human figure; but that human frame is but the tent, the tabernacle, the instrument of the Everlasting Thought of God, which made the world and has been the light in the mind of men of every age and clime.

And so this Being, in the image of a man, speaks with sovereign authority all down the narrative; declares himself the only way or life or light to lead to God; with a word destroys the kingdom of death; passes on, after briefest sojourn, to God, with the august promise that out of the unseen world he will send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, still to enlighten and to comfort when he himself has laid aside the body which he has used for a while as the medium of the revelation of himself.

At first Jesus the national Messiah of the Jews. Then Paul's larger and nobler Judaism for all the world, and the man whose life reaches up to heaven and fills the æons of the future and of the past. But now a Christ transcending by infinite expansion even the Christ of Paul.

For, though it is likely enough that in that Ephesian region he whom we call John had received the suggestions of the Pauline doctrine, and had been all along prepared to see in Jesus Christ one in whom the divine thought had fructified beyond the ordinary fruitage of humanity—his own mature conception is on quite a different plane. Paul starts from Jesus and works up and on towards God. John starts with God and moves down to Jesus. Paul's theme is a man lifted up to be the image and agent of God. John's theme is God the Eternal stooping to enter into the image of a man. The one is a supreme exaltation. The other is a supreme condescension. The one is man rising up toward God. The other is God coming down to man. And so was launched in the Christian consciousness the pregnant thought of the Eternal incarnate, enfleshed, in the figure of a Son of Man.

It is right to note before we go further that the author of the Fourth Gospel is not the only writer who about the same time associated the Logos doctrine with the

person of Jesus Christ. A writer known to history as Justin, the Martyr, a native of Palestine, but trained to some extent in Greek philosophy, made the same identification. He was not a very great thinker, and his 'Apologies' and 'Dialogue' are not to be classed for a moment with the great Christian Gospel either intellectually or spiritually. Still he did seize and present the same striking idea as the Evangelist, that the Word or Thought of God tabernacled in Christ. There has been much discussion as to whether Justin wrote before or after the Evangelist, and whether he derived any of his ideas from the Gospel. But the Gospel stands on its own merits, and is entirely unaffected by any such questions of literary history.

In any case, the inspiring conception of the Fourth Gospel is among the most august, sublime, transcendent conceptions that have ever swayed the human mind. Yet with what tremendous problems does it confront the intellect of men! There spring up forthwith such questionings—questionings of which

the answers are well nigh inaccessible. The author of the Gospel makes it clear that the Christ, this Jesus in whose flesh tabernacles for a time the Eternal Thought, is yet to be sharply discriminated from the God Supreme. 'I and my Father are one,'—yes, since it is the Eternal Thought that speaks. But, none the less, 'my Father is greater than I.' Yes, since God, who is the source of all things, is greater than his own everlasting Thought. That is a clear note too. What then of this historic person, this Jesus called the Christ; this person, this being, in what sense is *he* one with God, and in what sense is the Incarnate Thought, the Word, merged in the personality of Jesus? If *he* suffered on the Cross, did then God himself suffer that agony? And if God, then God the Father, since, 'I and my Father are One'? But that was blasphemy. And was he really man, real flesh and blood, this man in whom the Word thus dwelt? Or was it perhaps only a seeming, and did it only appear to the disciples that one of human pattern abode among them? And if the Father were God, and the

Son were God, yet they were not identically one, were there then two Gods—and was one inferior to the other? And in Jesus Christ was there a God-consciousness and a Man-consciousness, two persons under that same tent, or was the one consciousness merged or fused in the other? And were there two wills or but one will, and what will, if so, was that? These and numberless other questions, formidable indeed for the poor human intellect to deal with, were all involved and inevitable in that daring and exalted theory which the writer of our latest Gospel had put forth and touched to immortal life; and the story of two hundred years—yes, and more—in the Christian Church is the story of the debates, the arguments and counter-arguments, the charges and counter-charges, the enthusiasms, martyrdoms, strifes and struggles, sometimes noble, sometimes base, that were wrought out of the material of the doctrine which seemed for a moment to be the very apotheosis and consummation of Christianity.

It must not then be supposed that the doctrine of 'the Word made flesh' at once prevailed throughout the Christian Church. Although there were elements in the condition of thought that were highly favourable to its reception, the process of impregnating the whole body of Christian believers with the new idea was bound to be but slow. The mere fact that *no* new thought could travel afar save on the lips of missionary men or on laboriously written manuscripts made any general conversion in a few short years impossible. And not only would many instructed theologians see objections to the new doctrine such as I have above suggested, but the idea was in itself difficult and subtle, and, if it were to be accepted by the masses, must depend rather on authoritative proclamation than on popular argument; and at present there was no one in a position to make authoritative proclamation.

And so it came about that, starting roughly with the year 170 after Christ, we find a full century of eager controversy within

the Catholic Church itself before the doctrine, in any form, was universal and secure. As Harnack says, 'The philosophic Christology arose, so to speak, at the circumference of the Church, and thence moved gradually to the centre of the Christian faith.' At first the doctrine of the Word made flesh belonged to the scholars, the philosophers, the theologians. Generations had to pass before it entered into the common consciousness of the people and fed the daily devotional life of the uneducated and untrained. A mere glance at the discussions that followed the publication (so far as that is a word applicable to the diffusion of books in that era of the world) of the writings the fourth Evangelist and of Justin will suffice for our purpose.

The Christian Church was already beginning instinctively to feel the need of binding together not merely in the spirit of the Master, its original bond of unity, but also in definite doctrine and confession, and the bishops and their associates, though as yet without definite hierarchical order, gradu-

ally more and more assumed the function of declaring the doctrine which it behoved men to believe. Christianity had to face, on the one hand, the philosophy of the dying pagan schools, on the other, the tremendous social and political power of the State. It must have a unity and definitions of its own if it was to endure and thrive.

And so we find as far back as the last quarter of the second century Tatian, Anaxagoras, and Theophilus of Antioch, expatiating in one mode or another on the doctrine of the Word, though as yet by no means with the definiteness and unity of view requisite to harden fluid speculation into an orthodoxy out of which ramparts of defence could be built against the foe.

Among the famous theologians of the immediately succeeding period, we may select three or four of the most significant.

Irenæus, Bishop of the diocese of Lyons in the West, stands foremost, perhaps, of the theologians of his time. We find him already entangled in many of the questions immediately arising out of the doctrine of the

Word made flesh which we saw to be inevitable. He is troubled because some have represented the Word as having emanated at a certain point of time from the Father; and, as always proved inevitable, in trying to soften down a view which seemed to him to distinguish the Word too tangibly from the Supreme, he falls into the opposite peril of washing out any substantial distinction at all between the persons of the Father and the Son. The Son was the visible form of the Father, and the Father the invisible form of the Son; one of those verbal essays to express distinction without difference or difference without distinction which are the misery and despair of Christian theology, on the hypothesis of the orthodox, down to the present hour,—a kind of futile subtlety which, as we shall see, mars the writings of Anglican and Nonconformist writers of high repute in our midst to-day.

The fiery Tertullian, the Carthaginian, had none of the vagueness, however, of Irenæus. His predecessor's dread of denying a past eternity to the separate existence

of the Word had no appeal for him. The Word first emanated from the Father in the moment when the mighty utterance 'Let there be light' came forth from the lips of the Eternal. The Son, indeed, was distinctly inferior to the Father, and the Word was put forth at an historical moment of time.

Irenæus and Tertullian, with their opposing views, may be said respectively to have laid down the broad lines on which two of the supreme heresies of a later period on were laid, that, namely, of Sabellius and that of Arius. Athanasius alone of theologians, it may almost be said, walked steadily on the knife-like edge between these two interpretations of the doctrine of the Word,—and he did so only by sheer and fearless contradiction. Yet in one way Tertullian laid down the lines also for Athanasius himself, for he was very clear that the Son was of one substance with the Father.

Clement of Alexandria, always so styled in order to distinguish him from a predecessor known as Clement of Rome, was a thoroughly trained Greek philosopher before he became

a Christian. His training had taught him to think of the Supreme God as almost wholly abstract, unsearchable, unknowable, as truly as though he had sat at the feet of our own Herbert Spencer himself. And so he turned with avidity to the doctrine of the Word, as giving him a God in living relation to human thought and feeling. Yet the Word, too, he exalted to a dizzy height of divinity, and seems but unwillingly to recognise the historic facts of the biography of Jesus Christ. The thought of his human body, with its natural appetites and needs, evidently jarred upon his religious sensibility. Sometimes he seems hardly to believe that it was a real physical body at all. Sometimes he suggests that he suffered no real pain upon the cross.

So hard was it then—it is no less so now —to frame any intelligible account of belief that the Son is at once both perfect God and perfect Man.

But a greater name than that of Clement is that of his pupil at Alexandria, the illustrious Origen. A man of extensive travel and of encylopædic knowledge, he was the

first Christian theologian to put forth a complete system of theological doctrine. His system was much of it swept away, but he gave an impetus to theological speculation which went far to make the interest of dogma supreme in the life of the Christian Church.

Origen taught with unprecedented emphasis the eternity of the Word or the Son. Yet he does not hesitate to teach the inferiority of the Son to the Father, and rejects that which was subsequently the very central dogma of orthodoxy, the doctrine that the Son is of the same substance with the Father. It was the goodness of the will of Christ that united him to the divine Word and made him one with it. The human body of Jesus troubled Origen not a little, and it would have been a relief to him could he have regarded it as a mere appearance.

If it were legitimate to interpret the writings of ancient theologians by what they seem to imply, or what they ought to mean, rather than by their express and actual statements, we should think of Origen as virtually

a Unitarian. The union of Jesus with the Supreme was a union of spiritual and moral likeness. For this and other reasons his writings lost favour with the growth of orthodoxy. I suppose that his chief contribution to Catholic doctrine was his conception of the Eternal Word as the revealer of divine things to the human race.

But it must not be supposed that the doctrine of the Word was allowed to penetrate the Church without a protest. On the contrary, under the general name of Monarchians, which means much the same as Monotheists, we meet with a number of individuals and schools who vehemently protested against views which seemed to them to destroy the unity of God. The Adoptian Monarchians described Jesus as a man in whom the spirit of God dwelt, and who was in due course exalted to godlike honour. The Pneumatic Monarchians held that Jesus was a heavenly spirit who had assumed an earthly body. But according to Harnack, the first formulated opposition to the Logos Christology was not so much

due to anxiety for Monotheism as to love and loyalty to the Synoptic picture of Christ, the lovely figure, so human, so akin to ourselves, in the exquisite stories of the Galilean ministry. But, however that may be, the protest became fainter and fainter as time went on, and by the close of the third century it was clear that in some form or other Trinitarianism, including the two natures in Christ, was to be the only faith to be tolerated by the Church. The emotional desire to exalt the Christ was too strong to be restrained by the mere pleas of logic or of reason.

One name which appears towards the end of this period is very notable. It is that of Sabellius. And it is notable because to this day the taint of Sabellianism is much dreaded by those who value a reputation for orthodoxy. Sabellius was a contemporary of Origen, but his theological influence, never great in Rome, where he lived, or in the West, spread widely in the East after Origen's death. He must be counted a successor of those Monarchians who secured the unity of God, not by confining the Christ within the limits of humanity, as was

done by the Adoptians, but by treating the distinctions of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost or Spirit as simply modes of the one God. To Sabellius, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three names attached to one and the same being. And, however it may have been with previous Monarchians, the interest impelling Sabellius was that of maintaining Monotheism unbroken. 'What are we to say, have we one God or three Gods?' asked his followers. And the answer was emphatic: 'We do not teach Polytheism.' Sabellius called the Supreme by the name 'Son-Father,' that no mistake might be possible about his absolute unity. But, if he is rightly reported, he explained that God was not at the same time Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but had existed in successive forms or manifestations: that of the Father as Creator, that of the Son as Redeemer, and that of the Spirit as the Giver and Sustainer of life. Thus the form of manifestation named the Son had begun with the incarnation and ended with the ascension. We may say generally, then, that if Sabellius on the one hand helped

forward the subsequent cardinal orthodox doctrine that the Son is of the same substance as the Father, he laid the foundations of the persistent heresy known to the later theology as 'confounding the Persons.' And the name of Sabellianism has been roughly attached to the teaching of all such as in later times have treated the distinctions in the Godhead as merely indicating three qualities or faculties or aspects of God.

With these brief and bare indications we may leave the eager controversies of the second and third Christian centuries, controversies all springing from the inherent difficulty of framing a coherent conception of a God-man or of reducing to the forms of cold rationality the glowing emotions out of which was born the captivating imagination of 'the Word made flesh.'

We now draw near to a monumental landmark in the history of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the great and fateful Council of Nicæa. Before closing our review of the period running from the appearance of the Fourth Gospel to this epoch-making event,

let me in a paragraph remind the reader of some of the conditions under which the ever-shifting controversy—to us so intolerably dry and dead, to the men of the time so living and so ardent—was carried on.

First, then, this period of Christian thought was one in which the vision of an organised Catholic Church was slowly rising and consolidating. Secondly, the eager disputants over and over again proved themselves ready to seal with their lives their particular interpretation of Christian truth. Thirdly, it is very often only from their enemies that we have any account of their doctrines or their characters. Fourthly, they lived in the midst of a most luxurious and corrupt and cruel heathendom. Fifthly, in the main, on the other hand, the Christian Church showed human character cleansed and sweetened, made tender and heroic, which the lusts of the world wooed in vain. Sixthly, by degrees the very conquests which the Gospel made carried in them the seeds of corruption; for as it ceased to be only the poor and the few who made Christian confession, it began to have

enticements for the selfish, the worldly, the ambitious, the designing. Seventhly, the whole period from the rise of the doctrine of the Incarnate Word to the Council of Nicæa was a period of the gradual change of the centre of gravity of Christianity from a school of character, with all the stress on inward faith and goodness, to a school of stiffening opinion, with all the stress on correctness of theological belief.

VII. THE COUNCIL OF NICÆA.

And so we turn to the dramatic history of the Council of Nicæa and take a preliminary glance upon the scene. Who are the figures on the stage? Constantine the Great, a soldier, a politician, a world-statesman, stained with crime, yet certainly not untouched with the awe or even by the love of Christ, gathered round him these ecclesiastics and laymen of Spain and Italy, Asia and Africa, a great host, to settle once for all a raging disputation which threatened to split the Christian Church in twain. For he needed a united Christendom to lead against the

united heathendom with which he was waging war for the rulership of the world. And so, for the first time, state-craft played its part in determining Christian controversy. They came, the cultured and the rude, the proudest and the humblest, to that city washed by the Lake Ascania, probably some two thousand men, over three hundred of them bishops. Many were scarred and scored and maimed and mutilated from the persecutions of earlier Emperors. This Emperor stooped and kissed the empty sockets of one whose eyes had been gouged out in the reign of terror. What was the question this strange assembly was met to solve?

'There was (not a time, it was before time) when the Son was not.' That was the cry of the Arians. The Arian theology made the Logos, the Word, to be Son of God in the sense that he came into existence only subsequently to the Father. To the Athanasians that was blasphemy of the deepest dye. For it made God the Son inferior to God the Father. Nay, surely it either denied the Son real deity or made two Gods, a greater and a

lesser. Our age turns in weariness from such disputes. In the fourth century every street and square, the baths, the markets, the very bakeries, of Alexandria and Constantinople seethed with the heat and passion of them. The Arians sang street-rhymes packed with their theology. This Arius was profoundly in earnest. But, as it has been said, his arguments 'seem the incessant sharp rattling of a logic-mill.' Athanasius, a mere youth of twenty-five when he came to the front at the Council, was a man of far more commanding intellect, and of profoundest earnestness and indomitable courage, though his memory is stained with the violences that theologic zeal too often breeds. But there it was: the whole of Christendom convulsed with the bewilderments which had been inevitable from the day on which the devout and mystic Evangelist had proclaimed his doctrine of the Word made flesh. For in truth the conception, God-Man, is an inherent contradiction.

When I think of the men who composed that Council, of the sufferings, the martyr-

doms, the tortures which the very face and figure of so many a member testified, of the heroism, the constancy, the patience, the love, the burning zeal which had carried on the religion of Christ through the dark and evil days—when I think of these men there met at last under the imperial smile and friendship, I confess myself strangely moved. I know that their passions leaped forth in the debates that ensued. I know that there was but little calm reasoning on substance and hypostasis, on create and uncreate; but I know that the very earnestness of men, the passionate enlistment of their faith, has ever made theological debate the most eager and overbearing manner of debate; and looking at religious newspapers and controversies and divisions and sects and parties and congresses of to-day, I can forgive those men, many of them clad in rude coats of skin, or wearing their scars uncovered, not a few drawn from dioceses poor and wild, the tablelands of Asia, the deserts of Numidia, and wonder that an ideal purpose should so have drawn them from the ends of the earth and held

them there to give a law for so long a tale of centuries to the Holy Catholic Church.

For two long months they debated and discussed. The story of that Council has been told by the most brilliant Church historian who ever lived, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, with a fulness, a picturesque and vivid touch by which each actor lives before us once again and each incident throbs with all the dramatic intensity of the movement. To that account I would invite every reader who has any love for literature, for history, for the portrayal of great episodes in the evolution of our race. The Creed which at last was hammered out, and which gave the victory to the Athanasians, is the basis of that Nicene Creed which is the central bulwark of English and Latin orthodox Christianity to-day. Concerning the points chiefly at issue it declared belief—

'In one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is to say, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one sub-

stance with the Father, by whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things on earth. . . . But those that say, "there was when he was not," and "before he was begotten he was not," and that "he came into existence from what was not," or who profess that the Son of God is a different "person" or "substance," or that he is created, or changeable, or variable, are anathematised by the Catholic Church.' Observe the notable fact that it is laid down that we must *not* say that the Son is a different 'person' from the Father. The Greek word is Hypostasis; and this is the very word translated subsequently 'person,' when orthodox theology declared that the Son *was* a different person.

This Creed, then, for ever thrust the Arian theology outside the pale of orthodoxy. By a bold and uncompromising defiance of rationality, by divesting Jesus Christ of every vestige of real humanity, by ascribing to him every attribute of God, it strove to silence the controversies of two hundred years. It left Jesus Christ with a human nature only

nominally human. It destroyed the beautiful, but unstable conception given to the world by the fourth Evangelist of the Thought of God entering into a real and veritable human being. It left the Church, now bound and pledged to the alliance with the State, to face the centuries bearing on her shoulders the burden of a doctrine intrinsically unthinkable by the human mind, and to be maintained alone by stamping rationality as rebellion against the God of reason.

Once more, at this point of pause, look back on Jesus the Galilean,—the boy with wistful face questioning the learned men in the national temple, the young man drawn to Jordan by the Baptist's ringing voice, the man in the full battle of his ministry ever and again seeking some lonely place that he might refresh his soul in prayer to God, the interpreter to his brethren of the Heavenly Father's love,—the man so simple, so natural, so tender, so utterly and incomparably human, now tempted, now stricken, now striving, now conquering, ever and always seeking a strength that was not his own.

Look back on him, our Brother, kin of our kin, and, tell me, can you from your heart apply to him those words which come seething from the hot passions of Nicæa, 'God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, of one substance with the Father'?

VIII. AFTER NICÆA.

We have now traced the process of thought and of emotion which led on to the full doctrine of the Incarnation, from its first beginnings even in the life-time of Jesus on to the triumph of Athanasius at Nicæa,—a period as long as from the accession of James I. to the English throne to that of Edward VII.

The next century and a half sees further struggles. There was still resistance to the full dogma of the absolute deity of Christ. There were still efforts to save his humanity from becoming a mere fiction and to keep the Jesus of the earlier Gospels as a real and historical human being. But the trend of emotion, the reluctance to consider any language too absolute or too exalted in

which to present his nature, was too strong both for reason and for fact. The manhood, indeed, was formally conceded. But the next three great Œcumenical Councils of the Church put the coping-stone on the erection of Nicæa.

Of these Constantinople was assembled in 381, fifty-five years after Nicæa. Ephesus just fifty years after that in 431, and Chalcedon twenty years later still in 451. The great English divine, Richard Hooker, known as 'the judicious Hooker,' three hundred years ago summed up the whole matter of these four famous Councils (and it is a good example of the dryness of technical theology) thus :—

'There are but four things which concur to make complete the whole state of our Lord Jesus Christ, his *deity*, his *manhood*, the *conjunction* of both, and the *distinction* of the one from the other being joined in one. Four principal heresies there are which in those things withstood the Truth. . . . Against these have been four most ancient General Councils'—Nicæa, Constantinople,

Ephesus, Chalcedon. 'In four words—*truly*, *perfectly*, *indivisibly*, *distinctly*—the *first* applied to his being God, the *second* to his being man, the *third* to his being of both one, and the *fourth* to his still continuing of that one both—we may fully, by way of abridgment, comprise all that antiquity hath at large handled either in *declaration* of *Christian belief*, or in *refutation* of the aforesaid *heresies*.'

Surely if it might once be given to the Christian Church to open her eyes and see, she would perceive beyond all manner of doubt that these disputations and definitions are but so many vain and ineffective efforts to adjust the contradictory and reconcile propositions incapable of reconciliation. The true religion, whatever else it may be, cannot consist in affirming mutually destructive statements. Yet if Constantinople declares the Son to be 'perfectly' human, while Nicæa has pronounced him to be 'truly' God, and Ephesus proclaims him 'indivisibly' God and man, while Chalcedon by counter allegation lays down that the deity and the humanity

are rigidly 'distinct,' they simply affront the reason with which Almighty God has endowed his children, and make it the demand of faith that we shall use words without sense and pledge ourselves to solemn propositions which are in verity destitute of meaning.

Yes, it is sheer contradiction, neither more nor less; and there is a certain relief when still further down the centuries we come upon the Creed which, usurping the name of Athanasian, flings aside all pretence of philosophical consistency, and openly yokes contradictories together and demands their acceptance by the Christian on pain of everlasting death.

The Athanasian Creed, of unknown origin, somewhere from the fifth to the eighth century, declares:—

'The Catholic Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;

'Neither confounding the persons; nor dividing the Substance.

'For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

'But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

. . . . 'The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God;

'And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. . . . . .

'And the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;

'God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world;

'Perfect God and perfect Man. . . .

'Who, although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ.'

When the Protestant Reformation in the fulness of time rent the seamless robe of the Christian Church in twain, the great Reformers—Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and the rest—busied themselves with another department of theology, doctrines of atonement, redemption, and salvation, and accepted in block, and incorporated in all the great Protestant Churches, the full doctrines of the

Trinity and of the two natures in Christ, as they received them from that Rome against which they made revolt. The names indeed of Servetus, of Socinus, and of Unitarians in various continental countries and in England, remind us that there has always been a line of Protesters within Protestantism itself. But, broadly speaking, we find the Trinity, the two-fold nature of Christ, and specifically the Incarnation, at the basis of the theology of our own nineteenth and twentieth century Protestant Christendom. It remains for us to glance at these doctrines as professed by men who, though largely susceptible to the revolutionising influences of modern thought, still cling to the hoary creeds borne down to them on the stream of time from their distant sources in a remote antiquity.

PART II.

MODERN PLEAS FOR THE DOCTRINES OF THE TRINITY AND THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

I. THE CONTROVERSY TO-DAY.

IT is a curious phenomenon that on both sides there are writers who maintain that the Unitarian (or Trinitarian) controversy is dead, that it no longer interests, that the ground of battle has shifted, that Unitarianism is philosophically discredited, or, on the other hand, that Trinitarianism is a defunct superstition. How keen and vital the controversy still is will be realised by those whose studies lead them to the books of such preachers, in England or America, as have most vogue among the thoughtful, especially

among the middle-class, and most of all in the circle of the Congregationalists. In English Nonconformity generally the rise of the Evangelical Free Church Federation has seen a great revival of active Trinitarian profession and an eager desire to affirm with renewed emphasis and insistence the proper deity of Christ.

Let us turn then to the pages of a few of the broader theologians of our own day that we may see in what manner they present, expound, and defend the two great historic doctrines of the Trinity in Unity and the Two Natures in Jesus Christ, on which the orthodox faith in the Word made flesh—that is, the Incarnation—rests.

There are two vast and pregnant paradoxes upheld by orthodox Christianity in regard respectively to God and Christ. The first is the doctrine that the one God comprises three Persons. The second is the doctrine that in Christ are comprised two Natures, that of God and that of Man, in one Person.

I believe that a strict and careful analysis

of the writings of such theologians as I have in my mind will establish the fact that not one of them succeeds in stating the doctrine which he *explicitly* defends without *implicitly* dissolving some essential element of its structure. He who maintains the Trinity either so dissolves the three members thereof as to rob them of all significance, or else so elaborates the distinctions between them as to dissolve the unity of God into sheer fiction. He who, again, maintains the dual nature of Christ does one or other of these three things: he either makes the manhood of Jesus a mere appearance, or reduces the deity of Christ to no godhood at all, or else breaks up the personality into two persons without any real personal unity.

II. DR. FAIRBAIRN.

Dr. Fairbairn, the Principal of Mansfield College at Oxford, deserves, both by his influence and by his learning, a foremost place among the theologians to be marshalled in review.

Dr. Fairbairn, in his *Christ in Modern*

Theology, simplifies our problem by alleging that the consciousness of Jesus is the only true ground of any theology at all. Thus, unless Jesus himself shows himself conscious of his own deity in the records of him in the Gospels, the whole doctrine falls away. Observe that with this admission two-thirds of the historical theological teaching vanishes. Those of us who can trace no signs of consciousness on the part of Jesus that he was God are dispensed from considering further evidence or argument. In any case, the ground for the tremendous dogma of the deity of Christ is reduced to a minimum,—mainly two or three doubtful texts in the Synoptics, and the utterances of the Christ of the Fourth Gospel, which, so the deepest criticism suggests, represent not so much the actual speech of Jesus as the mystic philosophy of the unknown disciple at Ephesus generations after the tragedy of Calvary.

But it is in his exposition of the Trinity that Dr. Fairbairn is most precise. God 'is by His essence a society.' The three

Persons are the three members of this society. Viewed from within, God is 'love in eternal exercise, existing through personal distinctions, yet in community of life, . . . in ceaseless flow and ebb, streaming from its source in the eternal Subject, retreating from its eternal Object, moving in the unbeginning, unending cycle which is the bosom of the Infinite.'

It is, I think, impossible to attach any real meaning to such language as this without taking the term 'Person' in the doctrine of the Trinity in quite the modern English sense, in which a person is one having a clear individuality of his own. It is quite true that in the historical theology of the Church it will not bear that meaning. The English word is a translation of a Latin word for a character, and the Latin word itself is a very faulty translation of a Greek word (Hypostasis) meaning an aspect or manifestation. But it seems quite clear that two sides of one person cannot be said to love one another, nor can three aspects or manifestations of one being love one another. So

that, if we are to take Dr. Fairbairn's account of the Godhead, it certainly comprises three several Persons loving one another. Nor does Dr. Fairbairn make any attempt to disclaim this plain meaning of his own language beyond the courageous, but startling expedient of calling these three Persons collectively 'He,' as though they were obviously, not a plural, but a singular.

The germ of this conception, so far as the first and second persons of the Trinity are concerned, will be found in the late Richard Holt Hutton's treatise on *The Incarnation and Principles of Evidence,* in his volume of *Theological Essays.* He there contends that it is necessary to think of the Son as eternally associated with the Father, if we are to believe that love is of the essential nature of God; because love in its essence is social, and God's love could not otherwise find an object prior to the existence of created things. The simple answer seems to be that there is no need to suppose that there ever was a time when God was not already calling into being objects for his

love. But, in any case, Mr. Hutton's suggestion does not go the length of Dr. Fairbairn's. I believe that in the crude and naked form in which a Society, whether of two or of three persons, receiving and bestowing affection among themselves, is put forward by the Principal of Mansfield and, as we shall see, by many popular contemporary theologians, is almost entirely a phenomenon of the last few years.[1]

[1] The doctrine of a Society within the Godhead, developed in recent years by many others besides those theologians referred to in this volume, is almost entirely a modern growth. Origen and Augustine have been suggested as giving countenance to the idea, but in neither case does the proposed affiliation seem really to apply. The nearest approach to the modern account is to be found in Richard of St. Victor, a mystic rather than a 'schoolman,' who died in A.D. 1173, and who wrote treatises on the Trinity and the Persons thereof. In an article in Lichtenberger's *Encyclopédie des Sciences Religieuses*, A. Paumier says of Richard: 'Most of his arguments are drawn from Anselm. Richard derives his notion of the Trinity from the idea of God, whose essence is love. An infinite being who is love cannot find in any *creature* a love equal to his own. He must therefore have a being equal to himself and proceeding from himself. This eternal being, eternally proceeding from him, is the Son. Richard thus obtains plurality, but not Trinity. He arrives at this through the idea of Society, as two beings cannot love each other without egotism if they do not take in a third, the Holy Ghost, proceeding from both.' For this reference I am indebted to the Rev. J. E. Odgers, M.A., of Manchester College, Oxford. Not only do early Christian writers appear to give no countenance to the idea of the Godhead comprising a Divine Society, but there are indications that they would have

When Dr. Fairbairn proceeds to portion out the functions of the three several Persons in the Trinity, or rather those of the second and the third, the confusion becomes still more perplexing. Orthodox theology teaches that the Word is incarnated in Christ, and the Word is the second Person of the Trinity. But Dr. Fairbairn tells us that it is by the Holy Spirit that Christ performs his mighty works, and the Holy Spirit is the third Person

repudiated it with vehemence. For in fact the objection made by some of the recent writers whom I have cited to a God who is strictly unipersonal is the revival of a serious *pagan* objection to Christianity itself with which the Christians of the early centuries had to cope. The pagan antagonist to Christianity took exactly the same ground of objection to an unsocial Deity which Dr. Fairbairn, Mr. Campbell and others take now. Thus the pagan interlocutor in the *Octavius* of the pagan writer, Minucius Felix (of uncertain date in the third century), asks: 'Whence, or who, or where is that unique (*unicus*) solitary, destitute God' whom the Christians teach? And Lactantius (at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century), known as 'the Christian Cicero,' notes the same pagan objection to the Christian faith in the unipersonality of God. Having laid down that there is 'one King of the world, one Father, one God,' he proceeds: 'But perhaps some one may ask of us the same question which Hortensius asks in Cicero, "If God is one, how can his solitude be beatific?" As if we, who say that he is one, said that he is deserted and solitary; for he has servants whom we call messengers.' And then he explains that the angels are in no sense Gods. Neither Minucius nor Lactantius attempts to deny that the Christians' God is '*unicus*,'—which means alone of his kind, and therefore without Persons of equal rank with himself to break his solitude.

of the Trinity. And so he goes on to say that Christ and the Holy Spirit are 'co-efficient energies, or co-essential persons.' Neither could have worked effectively without the other. The Spirit is suddenly substituted to fulfil the offices hitherto ascribed to the Word. It is the ever haunting difficulty of rationalising orthodox theologians to keep clear the functions of the first and second Persons of the Trinity and to prevent their merging into one.

Dr. Fairbairn, however, is a very technical and obscure writer, of whose meaning one can seldom be quite sure; and we shall do well to turn to the writings of men who use simpler language that we may test the ability of modern theology so to state the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation as to yield a definite and self-consistent meaning.

III. DR. LYMAN ABBOTT.

Let us pass, then, to one of the brightest and freshest of American theologians, Dr. Lyman Abbott, and his well-known book, *The Evolution of Christianity*. Dr. Abbott

is a bold apostle of evolution—within limits. He sees in the Bible the same kind of inspiration which is diffused widely among other literature. But he breaks his evolution in the case of Jesus Christ. In him he sees 'the Infinite entering in human life,' and that, it would seem, for the first time in human history. He goes on to lay it down that the relation of God to Jesus is distinguished from his relation to all other men by the fact that in the case of all other prophets God spoke *to* man, while in Jesus God speaks *in* man.

The distinction has doubtless been gratefully accepted by many a young preacher, emancipated from the stiffer orthodoxies of the past, yet dreading to be supposed to have in him any Unitarian taint. God spoke *in* Christ; God spoke *to* the prophets. A convenient, terse, and striking phrase: but does it *mean* anything? Can any reader clearly state what is the difference between God speaking *in* and *to* a human spirit? The only distinction between 'in' and 'to' in such a connection is the distinction be-

tween outward and inward. But the speech of God with a man can never be outward; it is always inward. The divine thought flows out from the recesses of the soul. *How* it comes no wisest philosopher or theologian can ever tell us. This is one of those simplest processes of God which is not to be defined or measured by any psychology. The metaphysical speculations about Logos or Holy Ghost are the merest clumsy attempts to define the undefinable, to scrutinise the inscrutable. But when God speaks *to* a man, it is *in* that man that he speaks. If he spoke *to* Moses, he spoke *in* Moses; and if he spoke *in* Jesus, he spoke *to* Jesus: And *through* Moses and *through* Jesus alike, in whatever different measure, he has spoken to other sons of men.

But the confusion is made worse when Dr. Abbott proceeds, in a manner highly characteristic of the semi-orthodox school of which he is so distinguished a representative, to enlarge the meaning of the name 'Christ.' One of the great difficulties presented by the common presentation of the doctrine of the

deity of Christ is that certain propositions about him are laid down while the name stands distinctly and solely for the historic person, Jesus of Nazareth, and then these propositions are applied to a totally other Christ, the 'universal' Christ, or the Word of God, or 'the Son,' or the second Person of the Trinity, without warning of the change of application. And so Dr. Abbott shifts from the personal Christ of history to a 'Christ who is a perpetual presence, an ever-living Christ.' God 'has come into human life, and is gradually filling it with himself.' Be that so: but is the historic Jesus 'the Son,' the second Person of the Trinity, or is this coming of God into human life 'the Son,' the second Person of the Trinity? Surely they are not one and the same thing? If other men, by the entering in of God, become in a sense Christ, is this secondary Christ *God*, and is this collective human Christ a member of the Trinity?

IV. DR. WHITON.

But another American advocate of Trinitarian doctrine, the liberal and broad-minded Dr. Whiton, invites us into regions of confusion not less bewildering than those in which we wander with Dr. Abbott.

Dr. Whiton, in his *Gloria Patri*, attempts no such legerdemain as Dr. Abbott's distinction between God speaking *to* and *in* the spirit of a man. Christ is for him, indeed, God *in* man; but so also God is in all men in the same way. Dr. Whiton entirely rejects the doctrine of two natures in Christ, but he mixes up under the one name of 'Christ' or 'the Son,' the historic individual Jesus, the great company of good men, and 'the Deity in his revealed immanency in the life of the world.' Which of these it is that is the second member of the Trinity, one of them, or more of them, or all of them, it is hard to say, and all exact understanding of the writer's meaning is barred by this ever-recurring ambiguity.

In a later essay, contributed to *The New World*, Dr. Whiton sought to present an

eirenicon to Unitarians which should reconcile them to Trinitarian Christianity. Herein, it is to be confessed, he only followed, from the other side, the lead of Dr. Martineau himself. Dr. Martineau, in his celebrated article, *A Way Out of the Trinitarian Controversy*, points out that to the Trinitarian the Father is 'God in his primeval essence,' or, as Dr. Whiton puts it, 'the self-existent and absolute Deity, the infinite Source of all that is, unknowable except as revealed by the powers and phenomena which originate from Him.'

Now this is of course the sense in which the Nicene theologians use the term 'Father.' But it is the ideal opposite to the sense in which Jesus uses the term 'Father.' To him that name was the ideal word by which to express the nearness, the accessibility, the kindness, the unspeakable love of God. It was his vehicle for expressing the close communion between God and man; and therefore to wrest it away to express God conceived as absolute and unknowable is to do the utmost violence to the primitive vocabulary of Jesus,

in which vocabulary the living essence of his teaching, and therefore of the original Christianity, is enshrined.

Dr. Whiton, however, proceeds to give us in the first and second Persons of the Trinity, and especially in 'the Son,' all that Jesus gives us in the Father. To him 'the Son' is the manifestation of God 'in the outer world of form and life,' and 'the Holy Ghost' is the manifestation of God 'in the inner world of consciousness.' I submit that these distinctions are utterly artificial and unreal, that there is not a single syllable in the teaching of Jesus to justify them, that they entirely ignore the kind of sonship to the Father which he claims for himself and, in their degree, for other men, and that they are in direct antagonism both to the letter and to the spirit of his gospel.

V. THE REV. C. J. WOOD.

Passing on to a little volume by Mr. Charles James Wood, *Survivals in Christianity,* we find a fine example of the method of controversy by sheer assertion, which after

all is quite as effective in imposing orthodox belief on a large class of persons as such ingenious subtleties as we have just been examining. 'The inexorable verdict of history,' says Mr. Wood, 'is that the concept of the Trinity is the only permanent form of the idea of God; it is the only rational form.' And again: 'Jesus Christ taught that the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God.' Now by mere boldness of assertion Mr. Wood is likely to carry many readers with him. They will feel that the Unitarian controversy is closed. If Trinitarianism is the only rational form of the idea of God, even though we were inclined to think it irrational, why, we must needs accept it. And if Jesus Christ so distinctly taught the Trinity, why, it is not for us to impugn its truth. Mr. Wood's essay would be entirely triumphant but for the fact that he adduces and can adduce no grounds for the statement that the concept of the Trinity is the only rational form of the idea of God; and the further fact that Jesus Christ never taught

the thing or anything in the remotest degree resembling the thing which Mr. Wood declares he taught.

But modern orthodoxy holds its own largely by confidently assuring men that the Trinitarian doctrine of God is the only rational one, and that people who are satisfied with a uni-personal God show that they have no philosophical aptitude. Such statements should always be met by a challenge to state *why* the Trinitarian theory is the only rational one, and wherein the irrationality of the opposite hypothesis consists; together with a reminder that logical precision is as essential to right reason as metaphysical subtlety, and an invitation to state the Trinitarian doctrine without using the words 'God,' 'the Son,' and 'Christ' in shifting senses and without 'dividing the Substance or confounding the Persons.'

VI. THE REV. R. J. CAMPBELL.

When we come to the distinguished successor of Dr. Parker in the City Temple, we are carried back to Dr. Fairbairn's doctrine

of a divine society within the Godhead. Mr. Campbell published two or three years ago an interesting volume called *A Faith for To-day*. It contains much masculine and suggestive matter, and only when he, too, essays to set forth a rational account of the Trinity and the person of Christ, does the writer seem to fall away from the canons of logic and the rules of right reason. Mr. Campbell, I say, endorses Dr. Fairbairn's doctrine of a divine society within the Godhead.

'Let us banish,' he cries, 'the thought of a lonely, isolated God, having no fellowships and no relationships within Himself: God is Father, Son, and Spirit.' God contains within himself a companionship. 'God,' says Mr. Campbell, 'is able to express Himself within Himself, as it were; He goes forth from Himself in the Eternal Son, to return to Himself in the Eternal Spirit.' 'Within the Being of God the eternal abysmal reality is the Father; the Eternal Word or Wisdom or Activity of God is the Son, the going-forth of creation; the Holy Spirit is

the nexus between the Father and the Son.' 'These three are a society in unity, self-contained and self-sufficient.' But besides this economy within the Godhead itself, we are to think of 'the Deity locating Himself within human limitations,' 'surrendering omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, while retaining moral perfection and spiritual consciousness,' and so presenting himself in the historical person of Jesus, the son of Mary.

Now I shall have occasion, in dealing with a yet abler writer, Dr. Rashdall, to confess that this expedient of 'emptying' (known in theological language as 'Kenosis') of divine attributes out of God in order to make him Man, while retaining in the Man certain selected divine attributes in order to make the Man into God, is repugnant to whatever reasoning powers I possess. I cannot, I must acknowledge, think the thought: 'He is Man without ceasing to be God; he is God without ceasing to be Man.' To subtract from God some of his qualities in order to reduce him to be Man, and to add

to Man some other qualities not normal to the species in order to promote him to be God, seems to me to lead to a product that is neither God nor Man, least of all both, but a being anomalous and abnormal, the reality of which no conceivable evidence could substantiate.

But graver still to my mind in its unreason is the conception by which the Trinity itself is recommended. A lonely God is to Mr. Campbell unthinkable. To me a God made up of a society is unthinkable. If Father, Son, and Spirit are to be separate persons in any sense which shall relieve God of his supposed loneliness, and give him objects for his love, then I cannot think of them otherwise than as three several individuals, or of monotheism save as dissolved in a tritheism as complete as any polytheism of the classic or the oriental world.

But what does Mr. Campbell proceed to do? He suddenly reminds us that the word 'person' in the Trinitarian phraseology does not mean what we mean by it in modern

English, but that the *personæ* are only various characters or self-manifestations of God, and that there is after all but one supreme undivided personality, God from all eternity.

Well and good. So be it with all my heart. But then the whole explication of how the three Persons provide each other with objects of mutual love, and relieve the divine loneliness, entirely collapses. A lonely being cannot solace his loneliness by loving his own self-manifestations. And still less can the several self-manifestations love the lonely being or each other. One or the other: unity or triplicity. You cannot bring them both into play alternately. The multiplicity that breaks up solitude, breaks up unipersonality. The unipersonality that destroys multiplicity, undermines companionship. Mr. Campbell says, after his exposition, that 'thus, and thus only, is the mystery of the being of God to be even relatively understood by humanity.' Yet the explanation rests on these two foundations: first, the conception of a being who is God bereft of at least three essential attributes of God; secondly, the

conception of three members of the Godhead at one moment described as forming a society, as three persons form a society, at the next explained away into mere varieties in the self-manifestations of the one Eternal Person and therefore not constituting a society at all.

VII. PROFESSOR KNIGHT.

Professor William Knight, of St. Andrews, in the interesting volume *Inter Amicos,* containing his correspondence with Dr. Martineau, follows the lead of those who discriminate within the unity of God in order to provide social relations and affections between the members of this complex being. But he passes by the third Person of the Trinity with little more than a formal mention. His whole endeavour is to establish the thesis that God comprises within the circuit of his being, as it were, two *foci*, two centres, not co-incident, the one being, I gather, the Father, while the other is the Eternal Word, or, if it is preferred, the Eternal Son; and between these two *foci* there is the perpetual thrill of affectional

emotion from each to other. Thus is it provided that God, whose essential nature is love, shall for ever have, within the economy of his own being, resources for the activity of love.

Professor Knight gives us the powerful letter in which Dr. Martineau replies to his first statement of his theory; but unfortunately he only gives us his own rejoinder, having lost Dr. Martineau's further letter in response. It is, however, not difficult to imagine the line of criticism with which a reasoner so strenuous for logic and so unmerciful to haze would have met the St. Andrews professor's subtle plea. Indeed, the first letter of Martineau implicitly contains a full exposure of the logical weakness of Professor Knight's subsequent response. The argument will be on the lines which we have already had to lay down more than once in this sketch of latter-day Trinitarian apologetics.

Professor Knight is so frank and clear in disclaiming any idea that the Persons of the Trinity are persons in the colloquial sense,

and so unambiguous in maintaining that the Deity is a single personality, that there is none of the shifting about from a personal to a non-personal interpretation of the members of the Trinity which makes the reasoning of Mr. Campbell, for example, so elusive. These two elements in God, the paternal and the filial, are not persons, but—what? We should have said 'functions,' 'factors,' 'relations'; but Mr. Knight objects to that account of them when Dr. Martineau suggests these terms as answering to his correspondent's meaning. What it comes to is that Professor Knight only knows that the two members of the Godhead, assumed for the sake of establishing a to and fro movement of love within the being of God himself, are *not persons*. But if that is so, his theory seems to break up hopelessly; for there is in fact no refutation possible of Dr. Martineau's emphatic declaration that 'affection has no reality which does not go forth upon an extrinsic nature—another than the being who feels it.' And if you do not allow 'an extrinsic nature,' otherness 'than the being

who feels it,' in the object whom you provide to receive the divine love, then the action of that love is frozen into non-existence. 'An object loved,' says Dr. Martineau, 'cannot be within the loving nature, without reducing the love to a form of self-love.' Professor Knight contends, with such vagueness as we have seen, for 'a duality within the Divine *Personality*.' But Martineau objects that 'two somewhats in one Person' do not provide for the putting forth of love from the one to the other. That requires two *Persons* in the one God, and that his correspondent hesitates to affirm, nay quite explicitly denies. And so the two *foci,* ingenious as an illustration, fail to sustain the weight of suggestion which is laid upon them.

Approaching the difficulty which Dr. Abbott endeavours to meet with his distinction between God speaking *in* and God speaking *to* the soul, the difficulty, to wit, of so separating the relation of God to Jesus from his relation to other men as to justify speaking of him as 'unique' and as a being

to be identified with the Eternal Word or the Eternal Son, and, in fact, himself God, Professor Knight draws a line between the 'inspiration' of all other prophets by the Spirit of God and the 'incarnation' of God in Jesus Christ. Without at present discussing the exact meanings respectively of the words 'inspiration' and 'incarnation,' I will be content with observing that it seems to transcend human language to express the difference between the action of God when he 'inspires' and his action when he 'incarnates' himself. And I suspect that the failure of language to express that difference is due to the simple fact that down at bottom there is no real difference in thought. 'Inspiration' is a word based on the physical metaphor of God breathing, 'incarnation' a word based on the physical metaphor of God entering the flesh. Of the two, the former seems the more spiritual, and therefore the worthier simile. But apart from the symbol or the metaphor, substantial distinction in the mode of divine action set forth by either term seems hard to find.

Nor is Professor Knight sustained in his desire to confine 'Incarnation' to the case of Jesus, as opposed to all other prophets and saints of God, by the usage rapidly becoming current among the more thoughtful Trinitarians. Men like Dr. Clifford dwell with much conviction and emotion on the incarnation of the Word of God in many souls in many ages of the world.

VIII. DR. HORTON.

Let us next open the volume of sermons on *The Trinity* given to the world by the accomplished 'Nonconformist Bishop of Hampstead,' Dr. Horton. His treatment of the theme is very different from that which we have just examined.

Dr. Horton follows others in declaring that 'in God there are relations which are as well expressed by the terms Father, Son, and Spirit, as by any other which we can suggest.' 'From before all time, in the abyss of eternity, God was Father, Son, and Spirit.' He will not, I think, be found to escape the perplexities, inconsistencies, and contradic-

tions which have dogged the steps of others who have tried to draw out in logical sequence the contents of this doctrine. It would be wearisome to track his exposition in all its detail. Let us content ourselves with following him when he carries the warfare into the enemy's country, which he does with zest and zeal.

'Unitarianism,' says Dr. Horton, 'surrenders the revelation of God in Christianity, to fall back on the revelation of God in Judaism.' From Unitarianism 'the vision has gone. God recedes, and in the Christian sense, the sense in which Christianity has taught us to know Him, He is lost.' 'Monotheism,' that is monotheism as held by Unitarians, 'recognises a transcendent God; away on the horizon or beyond it, He wields his august sceptre, to be reverenced and feared, but hardly to be approached.' I submit that this is criticism extraordinarily wide of the facts. Let me ask Dr. Horton to open the writings of all or any of these writers, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, James Martineau, Francis William Newman,

Frances Power Cobbe, all of them writers coming under the classification of what he means by Unitarian or Monotheists,—all rejecting the deity of Christ, all rejecting the Trinitarian confession. Can Dr. Horton name any five Trinitarian writers of the same period in England or America who have had more open vision of God, who have more deeply realised God in the sense in which Jesus taught men to know him, as Father and Friend, of whom it would be more monstrous to say that for them the Living God is 'lost,' who have done more to show us that he may be 'approached' by every humble soul, who have more manifestly revealed that to them the way of approach is always open, always shining with the light of the divine love? It is hard indeed to reply with meekness to allegations like those I have quoted, seemingly so unconsidered, so reckless, so flagrantly untrue, so conspicuously unjust. Let Dr. Horton convict the impugners of the Trinitarian hypothesis of intellectual incompetence, of logical absurdity, of every mental aberration. But let him refrain from the charge

that this apostasy consigns them to these realms of outer darkness. Let Dr. Horton reflect that it is the long line of the orthodox theologians who have elaborated a doctrine of the Father which drives him off to a region 'away on the horizon or beyond it,' and who have had to contrive a theological scheme which shall bring God back again to human ken. It is the Unitarian who has never faltered in his fidelity to the teaching of Jesus that God is 'Our Father,' and who in that faith goes into his closet and prays to the Father who is in secret, and in the secret places of the soul of his humblest child whispers his word of love and peace.

But the explanation of such baseless allegations as I have cited lies in the abysmal scepticism which deep down underlies the current orthodoxy. It is because orthodox theologians themselves are so often absolutely sceptical of the practical accessibility of the Father that they think that only they who seek the divine love in the person of the Son can know the life of spiritual communion with God. Dr. Horton thinks that we can

have no knowledge that the Creator of this universe is love, unless 'we correctly understand Christ's person, his message, his working.' Apart from Christ he declares that we have no means of knowing that God is not 'a concatenation of awful uniformities which move like a car of Juggernaut over prostrate human beings to some unhuman goal.' But to address such language to any human being who has *felt* the Father's love flooding the chambers of the soul, with its quickening energy of strength and peace and consolation, is to utter vain speech indeed. And so again we must repudiate Dr. Horton's statements when he writes such words as these: 'To be without Christ is one and the same thing as to be forlorn and without personal knowledge of God in the world; for not only is the Father unknown except through Christ; we may be assured that the Father is unknowable except through Him. Until the Son was seen the Father could not be known.' How dares a Christian man declare that the Father cannot make himself known to whom he will? God's

Fatherhood to human souls is not a theological theory, depending on nice perception of the nature and relations of Jesus Christ. It is a solemn and instant fact of life, and there are a thousand modes by which the Father finds entrance into our hearts.

In the closing pages of his book Dr. Horton has a very noble and impressive passage on the universal Christ. He proclaims that the Christ is always at work even now in the world, a Christ who is something more than the Christ of the New Testament. 'Christ is a Power, a Presence, a Person actually at work in the world,'—'a Power and Presence, brooding over mankind, and in real or potential contact with every human being as such.' Now I submit that there is no difference between Dr. Horton and the Unitarian as to the fact of a divine presence thus constant and potent in the world, but that it would be a task of extraordinary difficulty to establish the theory that this 'Power, Presence, or Person' is identical with Christ, a historical being who dwelt in the flesh in Palestine nineteen centuries ago. I submit

that it is far simpler, wiser, and more consonant with probability and spiritual religion, to say that this Power, this Presence, this Person is *God*,—God always spoken of by Jesus as the Father, God who is the ever-present Holy Spirit energising always through the spiritual universe. This interpretation needs no hard and technical theology to establish it. It is just the natural interpretation of the facts, and is in absolute line with all that Jesus has taught us to believe concerning the Father's power and his love.

IX. DR. C. A. BRIGGS

Some years ago the interest of the religious world was aroused by the bold utterances of Dr. Charles Augustus Briggs, an American divine of great learning and scholarly distinction. Dr. Briggs has since then fallen into more conventional modes of speech, and he has quite recently published a book on *The Incarnation of the Lord*, which one would desire to treat with great respect. In view of Dr. Briggs's antece-

dents one would look at any rate for a handling of his theme marked by critical method, with careful examination of documents; and so far as his argument should be based upon the New Testament, one would feel confident that Gospel and Epistle would be subjected to examination in regard to authenticity, historical validity, and theological tendency, before being made the basis of positive doctrinal positions.

Such expectations, however, are disappointed in Dr. Briggs's pages. There is no critical examination. All New Testament documents are cited as of equal authority. It is assumed that what is taught in one is assented to in all, and that the New Testament yields a homogeneous doctrine of the Incarnation. From his treatment alike of the Old Testament and the New, the reader would suppose that Dr. Briggs had never in his life read a line of modern criticism of the biblical documents.

Taking his position as one who finds all texts of equal validity, Dr. Briggs proceeds to draw out of the New Testament a doctrine

of the Incarnation which shall square with one and all. I shrink from the task of following in detail the resultant exposition. Perhaps it will be enough to say that it leads the author into many strange positions. 'It is necessary for us to suppose that Jesus had a human mind as well as a divine mind.' He habitually spoke from his human mind, 'though he was sub-conscious of the possession of the divine mind.' Of the Incarnation itself we read: 'The Father did not become flesh. The Divine Spirit did not become flesh. But the Son of God, the Word, he and he alone of the three persons of the Trinity became flesh.' I suppose that this is the accepted orthodox doctrine. But as thus baldly stated, and on the lips of a modern man, equipped with all modern learning, it sounds strangely crude, and challenges one's sense of rationality, not to say one's sense of reverence. And what are we to say to this: 'And so Jesus Christ's flesh became the everlasting source of life, light, and wisdom to mankind'; 'we have to think of the flesh of the man Christ Jesus as the real flesh

of the Son of God, as in organic and vital union with the Word of God.' Such are Dr. Briggs's deductions from the opening passage of the Fourth Gospel. It is, I confess, repugnant to me further to trace an exposition which seems to me to be characterised by so inordinate a slavishness to the letter and a materialism so remote from a spiritual philosophy of religion.

X. DR. HASTINGS RASHDALL.

I have reserved for rather more extended consideration one able writer on the Trinity and the Incarnation. In examining his pages we shall meet once more with some of the arguments, positions, and contentions which we have encountered in the seven or eight works which we have now glanced through. Yet what we have seen already will, I think, suffice to suggest how slippery is much of the logic, how superficial much of the reasoning by which recent theological writers have sought to maintain the orthodox tradition.

Among the English apologists of our own time who have tried so to re-state the great

doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation as to render them acceptable to minds touched with the time-spirit of our day, none is more thoughtful, more cultured, or more liberal than Dr. Hastings Rashdall, of New College, Oxford. He published not long ago a volume of University sermons, under the title *Doctrine and Development,* which, for their temper of sympathy and intellectual courtesy, it is a pleasure to read, and four of these treat of *The Holy Trinity, Limitations of Knowledge in Christ, The Unique Son,* and *The Historic Christ.* The preacher tells us that 'this volume is intended as a modest attempt to translate into the language of modern thought some of the leading doctrines or ideas of traditional Christianity.' The sermons are unquestionably among the best specimens of their class. It is then well worth while for us to devote a few pages to their consideration.

Dr. Rashdall cuts himself off at once from those theologians who make so much of the idea of a Divine Society in the Trinity as offering a rationale of the purport of the

doctrine. 'When,' says he, 'some modern divines talk about an intercourse or society subsisting between the Father and the Son, meaning by the Son a conscious being, distinct alike from God, the world, and the "assumptus homo," Jesus Christ, they are using language which an orthodox scholastic theologian would probably have pronounced to be sheer Tritheism.' 'All the difficulties of the doctrine of the Trinity,' in his opinion, 'come from thinking of the relation between God and the pre-existing Logos as if it were of exactly the same kind as the relation between God and the Incarnate Son.' But the real doctrine of the Trinity simply asserts the essence of Christian Theism, namely, 'that God is not mere Power or mere Thought or mere Love, but the three combined.' But that is, after all, a statement that adds nothing to those forms of Christian Theism which fall within the conception of men wholly outside Trinitarian circles, and it can hardly be supposed to cover all that has been contended for in the great controversy of these sixteen hundred years. If that were really all, there

would never have been a Trinitarian controversy at all. Dr. Rashdall laments that any one should 'think of the three Persons as three distinct beings, three consciousnesses, three minds, or three wills.' Yet he admits that that is what most people do think when they try to realise the doctrine at all. He is quite right in reminding us that the word 'Persons' in the formula is altogether a wrong translation of the Greek word which it replaces. But the mischief is, first, that in popular theology the three Persons are always spoken of as if they meant just what popular language means by persons; and, secondly, that, when they are emptied of that significance, they seem to have no substantial meaning left.

Yet Dr. Rashdall does undoubtedly mean something real. He sees clearly those three elements in God—Power, Wisdom, Will. That, he says, is the recognised scholastic explanation of the Trinity. But the third element, according to him, may be spoken of indifferently as Will or as Love,—surely not the same thing. And elsewhere, by implica-

tion, he identifies it with Light,—the Light which lighteth every man born into the world. There is, on the same showing, it would appear, a Trinity within the Holy Ghost itself. And God may be spoken of as quadruple or quintuple with just as much propriety as he may be called a Trinity. Or, if Dr. Rashdall objects that Will and Love and Light are really but one, the answer is that, in God in like manner, Power and Thought and Will may be considered one. You must either think of God as unity or as indefinite multiplicity. You cannot really cry a halt at triplicity.

However, Dr. Rashdall holds that while the Word was incarnate in Christ, it is the Holy Spirit that has carried on the spiritual education of the human race since the time of the historic Jesus. It is 'of almost equal practical importance that we should try to appreciate and appropriate to ourselves all that God once said to the world by His Son, and that we should not close our ears to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches in our own day.' That is excellent and much-

needed counsel. But to me, I confess, it is impossible to understand how it can be maintained that the Word speaking in Jesus Christ is one Person (in whatever sense the term is used) of the Trinity, while the Holy Spirit carrying on the teaching in later times is another Person (in any sense whatever of the term). Surely it is the same person or property or mode or principle or aspect or faculty or energy of the Eternal that touched the souls of men through Jesus Christ then and which does so now. And the bewilderment becomes a confusion worse confounded when we remember that, according to Dr. Rashdall, the persons or properties of God expressed by Trinitarianism are Power, Wisdom, and Will or Love. Are we, then, to understand that, in Christ, Wisdom worked apart from Will or Love, while immediately on his departure to the bosom of the Father, Will or Love began to work apart from Wisdom? That is, of course, sheer nonsense, and Dr. Rashdall would repudiate the suggestion. Yet if his sermons teach anything clear and definite on these words,

that is what they mean. Surely, were it not for the confusions in which theologians have landed us, and the necessity to make the Trinity mean something, we should be content to say that, both in the ministry of Jesus and in all good ministries before and since, God, whom Jesus calls our Father, has been working on the souls of men.

In the next sermon our author goes on to discuss the limitations in the powers of Christ implied in his human nature, and this brings us more directly into touch with his doctrine of the Incarnation. He faces the immense difficulty (to the minds of some of us it seems the insoluble difficulty) of reconciling the real humanity of Christ with his proper deity. And he resorts to that doctrine of Kenosis or 'emptying' in which we have found other theologians seeking the key of the puzzle. He guards himself, indeed, against some of the applications of that doctrine which seem to him either to do away with Christ's Godhead or else to involve derogation of the deity of the Second Person of the Trinity prior to the Incarnation. But I

cannot but think that he actually falls into the danger he tries to avoid, and leaves us with a Christ who is purely and solely a man. And yet, in the process of his argument, he nevertheless will seem to some to do strange violence to a plain man's common sense.

Let us note his several positions.

He finds in the famous passage in the Epistle to the Philippians (ii. 5-6), about Christ not counting it a prize—or a thing to be grasped at—to be on an equality with God, but *emptying* himself, an indication that when the Eternal Word was united with a human soul, that of the man Christ Jesus, some at least of the divine attributes ceased to be manifested in him. 'Of what attributes of Godhead, then,' he asks, 'was the Incarnate Word divested?' And he replies that it was divested of three several attributes of deity.

He was certainly divested, he says, of Omnipresence. And of course it is true that the Jesus in whom the Word was incarnate was not ubiquitous. Jesus at any given

moment was in a particular spot of Palestine, and nowhere else. But according to the argument it was not only Jesus who was only at Nazareth, or at Capernaum, or at Jerusalem, but the Word, the Eternal Wisdom, that special somewhat which constitutes the Second Person of the Trinity; and if words and language and propositions have any meaning, on Dr. Rashdall's own showing, for the time being, the Word or Wisdom existed nowhere else at all. He would, of course, utterly repudiate such an interpretation of his statements. But if he is to be clear of contradiction, he must amend his statements before the inference can be avoided.

In the next place we are told that the Incarnate Word emptied himself of Omnipotence. And many orthodox believers, no doubt, will be prepared to admit that, however powerful, Jesus Christ was not omnipotent. But if the Incarnate Word, the Wisdom, ceased for the space of one human life to be omnipotent, then who carried on the universe, which at every moment and in every fibre depends on the Eternal Wisdom?

Again we are landed in contradictions unthinkable.

The only escape seems to be to say that, though the Incarnate Word was thus shorn of its divine prerogatives, yet the Word, the Wisdom, still lived its own divine life outside the Incarnation. But that Word or Wisdom, we are told, is itself the Second Person of the Trinity. In that case the Second Person of the Trinity is something other than, and beyond, Christ the Son of God, and the doctrine of Trinity falls irrecoverably to pieces.

The same difficulty attaches to the third channel of Kenosis or emptying which Dr. Rashdall suggests, namely, an emptying of the Incarnate Word of the divine Omniscience. In a series of very interesting pages, which, apart from their unfortunate place as links in an impossible argument, are highly suggestive and instructive, he presses the conclusion that the knowledge of Christ was certainly limited —that he not only had no sort of inkling of the vast areas of knowledge conquered by mankind since the day of his earthly min-

istry, but had no supernatural knowledge of the facts and incidents of his own time. Indeed, a limitation of knowledge, he thinks, 'is implied in the very idea of Incarnation.' But he maintains that such limitations placed no limit on his capacity to fulfil his spiritual mission. His consciousness was penetrated with certain spiritual principles and a direct apprehension of God which guaranteed his religious teaching. His Jewish or local ideas never hedged in his spiritual insight. And he uttered truths and principles which to this day ring with the notes of everlasting truth.

And that is so. But does an account drawn on such lines portray a God or a Man? Which is easier to conceive and to believe in, God emptied of knowledge—that knowledge which is at least an element of the Eternal Wisdom, the Everlasting Word, or a man of such gifts of mind and purity of heart and largeness of soul that the truths and principles which are for the salvation of men glowed in his spirit? For my part, while I cannot conceive of God barred off from his own essential qualities without doing violence alike to my

understanding and my reverence, I find it unspeakably inspiring, and no violation of reason, to believe that a pure Son of Man, one who lived in communion with our Father, rose up into such apprehension of the holiest truths, such realisation of the holiest life, as to be an inexhaustible fountain to future ages of the knowledge of God.

The whole difficulty with regard to 'the precise mode of the divine and human natures in the Incarnate Logos,' Dr. Rashdall thinks, would vanish 'if we would frankly accept St. Luke's statement that our Lord "increased in wisdom."' Increase in wisdom, he truly says, implies some preliminary ignorance. Precisely so; but it remains that such ignorance and such increase are predicable of a human being, but not of the Incarnate Wisdom. And after the concessions to the human limitations made by our author, it is no longer possible in the true and legitimate sense of the words to speak of the being in whom these limitations are observed as God.

In the Sermon on *The Unique Son* Dr. Rashdall urges that when the writer of the

first Epistle of John (iv. 9) speaks of Christ as God's 'only begotten' Son, the words really rather mean 'the only one of his kind,' and that we are to understand that he is Son of God in a unique manner. But the difficulty is that whenever the theologians have tried to state in *what* unique manner the man Christ Jesus was the Son of God, they have lost hold of any real and veritable humanity in him. As we are told in the sermon that follows, under the stress of the exigencies pressing upon the expositors, 'the historic Christ more and more disappeared from men's view, and was superseded by a metaphysical Christ, whose humanity was, indeed, acknowledged in word, but who lacked all the attributes of the humanity which we know. If he was still a man, he was a completely non-natural man.' That is abundantly true; and while one recognises that Dr. Rashdall has made a most gallant attempt to steer between the theological Scylla and Charybdis of a deity which excludes humanity and a humanity which excludes deity, it must, I fear, be confessed that he—like others before

him—has failed; and the sum of the impression which one receives from his earnest argument is that a man of his acuteness of intellect could never rest in it content, were he not blinded by the strength of his desire to make out a case for the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ which shall stand secure against the assault of the spirit of the time. And to me, at any rate, he seems finally to give away his case, when he ingenuously confesses that 'nearly everything that the Johannine Christ claims for himself he claims for his followers too in the measure of their actual consciousness.' The observation is undoubtedly true, and must mean *either* that, however much above them he felt himself to be, he knew that he was still on the plane of absolute humanity, *or* that these others also had the power to share his relation to Deity and so themselves to be included in the Second Person of the Trinity.

Now into these straits is this devout and thoughtful preacher driven by his desire to 'safeguard the belief in a personal God and Father,' which he thinks can only be main-

tained in full and permanent vitality by the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ. It is for those of us who cherish as the most priceless possession of mankind 'the belief in a personal God and Father,' yet find the arguments for the orthodox doctrine an offence to reason and to fact, to ask ourselves whether there are not other safeguards more consonant with rational thought, nay, whether the argument set up as a safeguard may not itself insidiously weaken and devitalise that supreme belief which it is intended to protect.

PART III.

THE HEART OF THE ARGUMENT.

I. SOME RULES OF CONTROVERSY.

IN Mr. Morley's Life of Gladstone we are told that, in the very height and tumult of his first great Midlothian campaign, he found time and detachment of mind to deliver his inaugural address as Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow. Before him were a multitude of the future divines of the Scottish Presbyteries, and the Lord Rector took occasion to describe how scepticism should be challenged by the champions of the orthodox faith. 'The thing to do,' said he, 'is to put scepticism on its trial, and rigorously to cross-examine it; allow none of its assumptions; compel it to expound its formulæ; do not let

it move a step except with proof in its hand; bring it front to front with history. . . . In the meantime, I would recommend as guides in this controversy, truth, charity, diligence, and reverence, which indeed may be called the four cardinal virtues of all controversies, be they what they may.'

The counsel breathes the great and noble temper of the man, and I for one am well content to accept the method and the ideal which it presents as the method and the ideal for those who question that orthodox theology which Mr. Gladstone so fervently believed. He tells us the right attitude of the orthodox towards the sceptic. Those of us who think otherwise than he, will do well to adopt that attitude towards the orthodox. Let us use the weapons which he suggests, handling them in the temper he commends. Let us put orthodoxy on its trial, and rigorously cross-examine it.

First, let us '*allow none of its assumptions*.' All orthodoxy assumes an authoritative external revelation, the final basis of all true theology. All Protestant orthodoxy

assumes a perfect consonance in teaching among all the writers of the New Testament, a perfect consistency between the Jesus of the Synoptics and the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. Let none of these things be assumed. If true, let evidence be given of their truth. They are very large and very startling assumptions. If not proved, or at least shown to be reasonably probable, let them be dismissed.

Next, *'compel' orthodoxy 'to expound its formulæ,'* and to expound them in self-consistent language. Orthodoxy has many formulæ. For the purposes of this book it is needful only to refer to those which state the doctrine of Trinity in Unity and the doctrine of the God-Man. Require, then, that orthodoxy shall state in consistent language its belief that God is three persons, whatever meaning it attaches to the word 'person'; and require that it shall state in consistent language its belief that Christ is both perfect God and perfect Man. And require not only that the propositions thus laid down shall be self-consistent in

themselves, but also that each individual term used in those propositions shall be used to stand for one idea, and not shifted from one signification to another to suit propositions successively affirmed. Require that in the statement of the doctrine of Trinity in Unity the word 'person,' or any other term substituted for person, such as 'hypostasis,' shall mean the same thing when it is used of each person or hypostasis separately as when it is used in reference to the unity of God. Let no interpretation of the term be adopted when the speaker refers to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost which has to be explained away when he declares the single personality of God. And let the word 'God' mean one thing only, and the word 'Man' mean one thing only, when he attributes to Christ perfect deity and perfect humanity; and require that the meaning of 'God' shall be the same as it is in any other proposition in which the word 'God' is used, and that the meaning of 'Man' shall be the same as it is in any other proposition in which the word 'Man' is used. And require that the word 'Christ' shall be

used in one sense only, whether it be as the title of Jesus of Nazareth, or as the name of the spirit that is in all good men, or as the divine energy revealed in human history, or as the divine energy revealed in the physical universe, or as the Word or Reason of God. And require that the term 'Son of God' also shall have its fixed denotation, whether it be a person or hypostasis of God or the man Jesus so described in the Gospel records.

'*Do not let*' *orthodoxy* '*move a step except with proof in its hand.*' If that be a just demand to make against scepticism, which doubts, much more must it be so against orthodoxy, which affirms. It is the affirmer, rather than the questioner, who may legitimately be pressed for proofs. To doubt is merely to confess that you have no proofs; to affirm is to imply that evidence is to your hand. Let us then require orthodoxy not merely to show that its affirmations are in themselves reasonable (though that also may be demanded), but also either that they must in the nature of things be true, or else that an overwhelming variety of circumstances

converge to render them in the highest degree probable, so probable that it would be unreasonable to deny them. To argue from the nature of things is deductive reasoning. To argue from converging circumstances is inductive reasoning. And pure reason knows no other mode of proof. If, then, it is legitimate to take to ourselves Mr. Gladstone's counsel and to refuse to orthodoxy (as he refused to scepticism) permission 'to move a step except with proof in its hand,' one or other of these two modes of proof, deduction or induction, proof from the necessity of things or else proof from cumulative circumstances, we are authorised to demand, or else to bar the way.

'*Bring*' *orthodoxy* '*front to front with history.*' But so to do is almost to demonstrate the unstable nature of its basis. So shifting has been its argument that the orthodoxy of one age is the condemned heresy of another. So shifting has been its terminology that different writers use its crucial terms, substance, hypostasis, person, in precisely opposite senses. So far has the

shaping of its articles been from arising from purely intellectual or spiritual forces that at every determining moment we see politics, statesmanship, ecclesiastical considerations, and the hot passions of personal rivalry, partisanship, and ambition covering the field. It is impossible even to pretend that the pure desire for truth was the moulding force in the making of the creeds, and the orthodox ecclesiastical historian is thrown back on the daring theory that the Holy Spirit used the impure tempers of men for his divine purpose, and so guided and governed the voices and votes of priests and prelates, who knew not what they did, as to lead up to the infallible enunciation of the eternal truth.

Let us, then, in our examination of orthodox theology adopt all the intellectual methods recommended for the undoing of scepticism by the great religious statesman whose language we have cited. But let us ever hold by those further counsels by which he supplements his suggestions of modes of reasoning. Let us take 'as guides in this controversy, truth, charity, diligence, and

reverence, which indeed may be called the four cardinal virtues of all controversies, be they what they may.' With earnest desire to be found in this spirit I invite the reader to enter into the ensuing argument.

II. THE COMPLETENESS OF THE REFUTATION.

So far these pages have been devoted to two things. In the first place I set forth the beginnings and development of that process of exaltation in men's estimate of the nature of Jesus Christ which continued without pause till he was declared to gather up in his person all the attributes of the infinite and eternal God. Slowly, surely, through the generations and the centuries the estimate of his person grew. The process began within the materials of the Synoptic Gospels. Before those Gospels themselves existed otherwise than as floating traditions, it received a startling impulse in the reasonings and rhapsodies of Paul and of some of the men of the Pauline school. Presently it was caught up and carried further in the great

Gospel bearing through the ages the name of John. One might have shown other stages of the growth in the Epistle to the Hebrews and elsewhere within the covers of the New Testament itself. But after all those documents had been given to the world, still the process of exaltation went on. Famous names of the second century and the third added fuel to the flame, till at the famous and gorgeous Council of Nicæa a higher orthodoxy than had as yet been known was reached and authoritatively proclaimed. But still the figure of the Christ grew in divine prerogative, and new Councils devised new safe-guards for the doctrine of the Christ perfect Man and perfect God. And in the fastness built with such determined hands by the men of old the central dogma of orthodox Christianity has been guarded and preserved to the twentieth Christian century.

Having sketched, so far as seemed necessary, this most remarkable and momentous movement of Christian thought from the beginning and up to the point of culmination, in the Second Part, with an abrupt transition, I

turned to a number of popular teachers and preachers of our own day, that we might consider how great was their success in re-stating, explaining, and defending the two great doctrines of the Trinity of the Godhead and the dual nature of Christ, which they received as the legacy of their orthodox forerunners. We found that in few cases, if in any, do they even state those doctrines in terms that would be acknowledged by the orthodox of old, and that not one of them succeeds in explaining them even in the form in which he states them in language which a logician can allow to pass; while even of the illogically stated thesis the defence breaks down under one or more of the methods of assault which Mr. Gladstone recommended for the conduct of another controversy.

So far we have gone as yet. I will confess that to me so far the argument seems to suffer from its too complete success. As wielded, not by me, but by abler men, the argument against the doctrines of the Trinity and the Deity of Christ seems too complete. It is so clear that the belief in the deity of Jesus

only grew up long after his life and in seeming contradiction of its facts, and it is so clear that the proffered defences of the doctrines of the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ are totally unfitted to protect them from the assaults of logic, of reason, and of common sense, that it is impossible to believe that these doctrines could have attained to their actual strength and permanence unless they drew vitality and force from some consideration which has as yet escaped our notice.

III. WHENCE THEN THE PERSISTENCE OF THE DOCTRINE?

And such is in truth the fact. The strong argument for orthodoxy is that, in spite of its seeming lack of historical foundation in what we know of Jesus of Nazareth, in spite of its seeming unreason, it has endured,—endured through vast expansions of human knowledge, mighty upheavals of human thought, penetrating changes in the structure of human philosophy,—endured in the breasts not of ecclesiastics only, but in the hearts of myriads

upon myriads of the common people, Latin, Celtic, Teutonic, passive wearers of the tyrant's yoke, fierce warriors for human freedom. There is something here that transcends a logical formula, something which cannot be undone by a controversial tract.

When we see a belief which we are convinced is untrue and contrary to right reason prevailing persistently through long ages of time and over vast areas of territory, what we have to do is to try and find out what widespead human need it meets. For the most strongly rooted faiths are not held because they are logical or reasonable, but because they help, strengthen, or console. And it is amazing with what persistency they will endure if they do that, after they have been triumphantly refuted over and over again. And so he who would weaken their hold upon the hearts and consciences of men—as indeed every true man must desire, if he holds them to be untrue and has faith in the God of truth—must show that they themselves are not essential to that helping, comforting,

and strengthening, but that these will be found in yet richer measure in a doctrine nearer to the veritable truth of God.

False beliefs live by the true elements within them.

What, then, are the human needs or the underlying truths which have given vitality and enduring grip to doctrines which this book combats?

All that long process of exaltation of Christ in the earlier centuries was due, I take it, to an instinctive sense that in the person of Jesus was the initial impulse of a new spiritual energy for the redemption of men. To the men who were about him in the brief days of his ministry it was enough to feel the kindling of his power in their hearts. By present personal contact he stirred in them all that was best and holiest in their being. Even if at the moment they failed fully to apprehend his spirit, when he was gone from them, under the overwhelming experiences and emotions of those pregnant days, the revelation broke upon them of what love, goodness, purity, faith, inwardly meant.

The memory of Jesus, cherished and illuminated in their hearts, became to them a power to salvation. They knew that God was with them. They knew that the Father of whom he had spoken, was their Father too.

But the years passed on. They who had seen him became fewer, and even they began perhaps to recall him with dimmer memories. And the living, vital religion which they had caught from him failed fully to reproduce itself in the hearts of those who had never known him. Yet all knew and believed that the impulse had come from him; and since the natural power of his spirit when he had been present began to fade or fail, by an inevitable process supernatural power began instinctively to be ascribed to him.

But as the Gospel by degrees found its way over new and distant regions, it began to encounter new and varied opposition. The unbeliever could not understand what authority men could discover in a common Galilean peasant; and the rejoinder was more and more confidence in asserting supernatural and miraculous prerogatives to justify dis-

cipleship. And indeed by this time the gentle, strong, simple Jesus was much forgotten, and disciples began to feel the need of reliance on a founder who was something more than an ordinary man. It was not enough that he shone with the light of human goodness. And so,—as in the case of every great founder of religion in the history of the world,—the magnification, the exaltation, the drawing nearer and nearer to God, went on, and a person of Christ grew up in the minds of men sufficiently above our common humanity to be readily conceived, when the moment came, as the human mould into which might be dropped the essence of actual Deity,—a figure which I borrow from a striking letter of Cardinal Newman to Mr. Gladstone in reference to the latter's criticisms of *Ecce Homo*.

And here, specifically in the Gospel according to St. John, the movement of the gradual exaltation of Jesus met another movement, that of the descent of God to man. We must never forget that as the centre of gravity of Christianity had shifted from Hebraic to Hellenic centres, the idea

which in the mind of Jesus had been expressed by the word 'Father' shifted to the idea which Greek philosophy necessarily associated with the term. Jesus spoke of the Father as one so near and close that the soul of man might come into contact with him in the chamber, in the field, in whatever place the simple worshipper sojourned. The Greek terminology took away the Father from this familiar intimacy with man, and in fact set aside the name of Father to stand for God conceived in his most abstract being, his furthest remoteness from men, the Absolute Being, to speak of whom as entering into intercourse with a man and listening to or responding to his whispered prayer, was to do violence to all philosophy. And so a great dilemma, perhaps not articulately realised, but none the less urgent and momentous, was presented to the Christian consciousness.

The Christian consciousness had not lost the fact of the divine communion. Men knew by the blessed experience of life that God did still speak inwardly with the spirit of a man and, in response to his prayer, flood

his being with love, infuse into him new spiritual strength, hallow him with peace and joy that were not of earth. But it was no longer possible to explain this by the simple contact between the Heavenly Father and his human child. The Father was the Absolute, the inaccessible, the unthinkable. So these deep phenomena had to find some new and less simple explanation. And thus there was developed an unconscious craving for a doctrine which should bring God down to men, and re-justify the instinctive faith, which was the central essence of the teaching of Jesus, and to which all highest spiritual experience responded, that the God-Spirit and the man-spirit may indeed commune and hold real and vital intercourse.

And such a doctrine was presented by the conception of the Word or Reason or Thought of God, which had been with him from the beginning, and which indeed was actually God, though not God conceived in his absolute being, descending into the man Jesus, and penetrating his flesh even as the human spirit of each one of us penetrates

and permeates his own fleshly and physical person. It did not so greatly matter that the doctrine was charged and surrounded with difficulties, that no man could say how the divine Soul and the human soul commingled or were related in this unique and two-fold being. The suggestion met the need. It brought God down to man. It furnished a medium, a Mediator, through whom the human spirit could still enter into high converse with God, and God himself could enter into the consciousness of the worshipper. It might rest on an unstable philosophical foundation. It might be easy to refute in the schools. But it gave rest to the craving for an intellectual justification for the facts of the spiritual life known by the supreme authority of personal experience. And so from that day to this, in spite of every assault, in the face of every refutation, it survives. And it will survive until the worshipping soul of man comes back to the simpler gospel which lay at the heart of Jesus and was expressed by him in terms of the real and living Fatherhood of God.

IV. JESUS' OWN TEACHING.

Now the teaching of Jesus in this matter was very simple. It could not be drawn up in a series of articles of belief. There could be no series; only a single article. Perhaps in the simplest form in which that article could be set down, it would run: 'God enters into communion with the soul.' But even this Jesus did not propound as a thesis, enunciate as a doctrine, still less as an authoritative dogma. The statement was a simple declaration of experience,—experience familiar in his own consciousness, experience reported in their own cases by writers in the old Scriptures of his people. Prophet after prophet had declared that God spoke to him. The Psalms were full of the like proclamation. The Histories recited the fact over and over again. That God is the Friend of man, that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him, was the choral song of the sacred books. The faith, the fact, were part of the inalienable heritage of the Hebraistic spirit; only, in Jesus the faith, the experience, shone

out with an unprecedented light, shadowed by no darkness at all. And in his mind and heart it clothed itself in the conception of God as a Father, with the human race as his children.

And Jesus, both by his instinctive trust in God and by his intuitive insight into the spiritual nature of men, was sure that the like experience of the accessibility, the responsive love, of the Father was open to the rest of men as well. And his gospel was one long effort to awaken their slumbering spirits to consciousness of the reality of this divine communion. Even to himself I doubt whether he put it as a theory. But he loved the people, and he longed to quicken in them the same inward life that was to him strength and joy and peace. It was not a theology, a philosophy that he presented to them, but a life of the spirit,—a life which they could see mirrored in himself. If he had been God, he could not have called upon them to enter into this life with him, for they were only men,—men burdened with the hard day's labour, women weary with the cares of home. But it

was because he was purely human and yet knew the great secret, that his word was with power to them, and that in the flow of the ages it availed to change the history of the world.

But we must confess that Jesus offers no explanation of the communion of God with the human soul or of the soul with God. It was enough for him that he knew that God is love. He offered his religion as the fruit of actual and incontrovertible experience. And, indeed, no explanation could be given. Explanation is for complex facts which need to be separated into their elements that they may be understood. But of the ultimate facts there never can be explanation. They are given. They are there, the fundamentals: from which explanations of facts logically following them may be drawn, but themselves prior to all explanation.

No man can say how there come to be God, or universe, or self. He only knows that they are. With regard to universe and self, their existence once given, he can reason out the how and the why of many things.

Even with regard to God, if he walks with humility and reverence, perhaps he may reason out results. But God and the universe and himself he has to take, without expecting to explain the why or the how of their existence. I do not mean that metaphysical arguments may not be constructed intended to justify the belief in God, universe, and self respectively, but merely that in the actual life of the mind belief in these entities is not referred to a metaphysical argument as its basis, but is immediate, self-justified, and a constituent element of consciousness. A man believes in these entities, if he has any living belief in them at all, on the immediate testimony of consciousness and experience. And in the like manner he may believe or disbelieve the great affirmation that God communes with man, which is the essence of the teaching of Jesus ; but he cannot explain it,—that is, he cannot dissolve the proposition into simpler facts from which it is compounded. If true, it is ultimate; and only experience, a man's own experience, and, less directly, the testimony of the

experience of others, can show that it is true.

But to Jesus it was true, absolutely, incontrovertibly. There it was. And he wakened the conviction of it in others. And through him the spiritual life, the life of prayer, of communion, the life of man with God as of a child with his Father, became a larger and more shining fact in the evolution of our race than it had ever been before; and with it came a deeper sense of human brotherhood than had ever yet possessed the nations.

V. THE CRAVING TO ANALYSE.

But when his Gospel found lodgment in the subtle minds of the Greeks, their questioning, analytical intellects fastened on the problem which the Great Master had passed by. They wanted to know *how* God communed with man. Had it not been for that unhappy ambiguity by which the Church now used the term 'Father' in a wholly different sense from that in which Jesus himself employed it, perhaps after all the subtle inquiry

even yet would not have arisen. Perhaps the Fathers of the Church would have been content to accept as ultimate the fact that God and man *do* hold spiritual communion. We are content to accept the fact that man projects thought to man and receives reply. Perhaps the philosophers, in like fashion, would have been content to say that God and man do hold converse. But already they were committed to certain conceptions of the Father as Absolute, the Unconditioned. They were accustomed to discussions as to how this Absolute came to be the author of the world. They were familiar with theories which imagined agents, emissaries from his being, who alone came in contact with matter and shaped the visible universe. It would have been a shock to all their pre-conceptions to be asked to say that the Absolute set up the thrill of communion between himself and the soul of mankind. And so it was felt to be a happy refuge to conceive of the Word, which was with God from the beginning, and in a sense was God, though not the Absolute, acting as

emissary from the Absolute God to the children of men.

Now to all theories which thus set up a medium of communication between God and Man, between the Father and the Child, the answer is that no medium whatever is necessary. The theory is built on a supposed necessity which does not exist. The communication between the divine and the human spirits is not mediate but immediate. The touch of the Infinite Spirit with the finite spirit is without intervention of any third term whatsoever.

The dogma that there must be a medium of communication, that the touch cannot be immediate, though advanced with confidence as an axiom of philosophy, is in fact sheer dogma and nothing more. Nor, if the necessity were real, would the orthodox account of things avail to meet it. The dogma is that God (the Absolute God) and the man cannot meet without a medium, and that that medium is provided by the Man Christ Jesus in whom was incarnated the Word of God. But this really only trebles the initial difficulty. If it

be true that one intelligence cannot impress itself upon or receive impression from another without a medium, a vehicle, to carry the message from one to other, then, under the orthodox theory, you will require a medium, a vehicle, first between the Father and the Word, next, between the Word incarnated and the Man in whom it is incarnate, and, lastly, between that one Man, Jesus, and the rest of the human race. *How* does the Father communicate himself to the Word? *How* does the Word communicate himself to the human consciousness of Jesus? The term 'incarnation' is a mere symbol to cover up the difficulty and put it out of sight. *How* does the human Christ enter the minds and consciences of the Christian myriads?

The fact is that the mode in which one spirit sets up a current of communication with another is one of the ultimate mysteries of conscious being. All accounts that can be given only amount to the statement that these currents of communication actually are set up. In them consists all conscious life that surpasses the self-communings of abso-

lute solitude. But we can never discover the ultimate organ of contact, be the communion that between man and man or that between man and God. The last word of philosophy is, and ever must be, that the spirit is its own organ, and that the power of communion with another is an inherent and ultimate fact of being.

The course, then, most consonant with true philosophy is to revert to Jesus's own simple account of the communion between God and man. God is, in this respect, like a Father, whose love impels him always to listen to his children's cry and to answer heart to heart. 'Pray to thy Father which is in secret.' 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' Accept the fact: its proof and its only proof lies in the courts of the soul's experience. Its explanation lies outside the boundaries of any philosophy to be compassed by the mind of man.

Yes, if this communion between God and Man, between the Father and the Child, is a reality as taught by Jesus of Nazareth, it is

a reality that stands above analysis,—an ultimate fact of life. But the final question still confronts us. *Is* it a fact? *Is* there communion between God and man, touch of Spirit on spirit? Are prayer and its response realities? May the human soul be consciously in touch with the Soul Infinite and Eternal?

VI. THE TRUTH BEHIND THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION.

Before we put to ourselves that final and most solemn question, let me gather up some of the observations that have already been made in these pages. However dry the husks of theological controversy with which the doctrine of the Incarnation is encumbered, of this we may be assured, that it could not so persistently endure, through century by century, in so many shifting forms, adjusting itself to so many successive habits of thought, defended with so indomitable a courage, urged with so passionate a devotion, unless, wrapt in its folds, there were some vital and eternal truth of God which the human

soul has need of in its ascent to the spiritual life.

What, then, is the Truth behind the doctrine of Incarnation?

The central essence of that doctrine is that God himself has entered into man, mingling his being with the human. And the *earthly vessel* in which that faith has been carried, the *material form* in which it has been encased, is that God has 'become flesh,' incarnate, enfleshed, in the frame of the man Christ Jesus.

The doctrine of the Incarnation then has been the cry of the human soul for communion with its God. It is, behind its particular form, behind its limitation, its crudeness, its contradiction, the bold and triumphant allegation that the spirit of God comes into touch with the spirit of man, that the spirit of man can breathe in the spirit of God. And that bold and triumphant allegation is an allegation that is absolutely and everlastingly true. There may be a thousand misapprehensions, delusions, superstitions in the doctrine of the Incarnation; but the

truth out of which it has grown and drawn the sap of life is a supreme and fundamental fact of the spiritual world.

And so, I would say to my readers, as though we stood face to face, exchanging the formality of the printed page for the directness of personal speech: Men and women, you young men of active and critical intellect, you young women of gently inquiring heart, you amid the bewilderments, the trials, the temptations of this our strange and difficult daily life, I ask you to go back behind the particular doctrine, the legend of the dove hovering over the head of Jesus, the legend of the virgin-birth, the dogma of the God-man, so crude, so bewildering, so impossible, so destitute of solid basis on which to rest, and to face this problem of the intercourse of God and man in the unseen communion of the soul. *That* is the fact to which all religious biography so profusely testifies. *That* is the fact which is poured out upon the world, in perpetual store, by the experience of myriads of human beings. *That* is the secret of the martyr's strength.

That is the source of the long patience of innumerable hosts of the suffering and the sad. *That* gives companionship to multitudes of the lonely. *That* gives sinews of strength to many an arm for the herculean task. *That* kindles the love-light in the eyes of so vast a company of the good, the tender, the helpful, the ministering, the sympathising, the loving.

Yes, this intercourse of the spirit of God with the spirit of man is testified by a million witnesses. But I do not bid you accept it on such testimony alone. Rather I bid you search your own heart. Read your own record. Question your own experience. What are the secrets of your own inward life? Do you know nothing of a Somewhat, a Someone, never leaving you, there deep down in the very recesses of your being? When you have been still, when you have been very quiet, has no voice whispered at your heart?

You were tempted; and there came to you out of the depths a warning, a call to be true. You did wrong; and there came to

you a voice of reproach, to which you could not close your consciousness, though it had no speech nor language. You were brave and steadfast; and there came settling down on your soul an unspeakable peace out of the eternal silence.

Nay, my friend, were you never lonely and sad, and out of the unseen came the accents of a friend? Were you never in darkness, and lo! there welled up in you a love beautiful and strong and full?

Nay,—and here we go to the very heart of the matter,—in trouble, in distress, in perplexity, in pain, you have laid down your soul before God and besought him, you have sent the cry of your spirit into the unseen that he would help you, and the answer has come, still and silent, stealing over your soul, bringing strength and peace. The love has flowed over you. You have seen the Father's face. You have felt the Father's hand. You have been drawn to the Father's breast. You have known that you are his child, and the love of God has been over you as the arms of a mother round about her babe.

I am only trying to express very simply what has been the experience of millions of the sons and daughters of God. It is no fancy. I use no rhetoric. These are solid facts of life. There are men of business, women of housewifely life, all round about you, who could *tell* you it is all true, only they are shy of speaking the secrets that lie between them and God. But perhaps the whirl of business, or the perplexities of the intellect, —or perhaps even some grain of evil in your own hearts,—has hidden these things from *you*. Then be very humble, be very patient, be very faithful, busy yourself with some ministry of self-forgetful love, and it shall surely come to you, the voice, the vision of the Father. For it is they who are still that come to know that he is God. It is to the pure in heart that it is given, as Jesus says, to see God.

Now this vivid sense of actual communion with God is, it is true, a mystery indeed. *How* the line is laid between the Father and the human child, *how* the thrill of communion is set up, *how* the human heart projects itself

into touch with the Everlasting, *how* God sends the answer of love and peace which is his response to the prayer of the praying soul, no man can say. But the same is true of *all* communion between different persons. How do I charge language with my thought and waken the recognition in the thinking of your minds? How does a mother quicken in her child a sense of the love that is in her? How do the hearts of friend and friend, of lover and beloved, of husband and wife respond each to each with a spiritual vibration so ready and so true? It is all mystery, —an ultimate fact of life which we cannot get behind, one of those ultimate simplicities of which there can be *no* explanation. Only we know it, feel it, experience it, live by its vivid reality and truth.

The theologians thought that by the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in the flesh of Jesus Christ, by making the second Person of the Trinity both God and Man, they solved the great riddle. They thought that thus they had brought God and Man together. Yet in truth, logically speaking,

they had *destroyed* the very beauty and significance of communion. Whereas on the mountain-side whither he went to pray, or in the Garden in his hour of mortal anguish, Jesus poured forth his whole soul to *another*, even to *God,* and so, and only so, won the peace and strength and courage of which he had sore need, the orthodox theology makes all his prayer a *praying to himself*, for he was God. It sees the closeness of the communion of Jesus Christ with his God, and tries to explain it by saying that in fact Jesus and God were actually one. Yet surely thereby it does away with the very reality and sanctity of that communion. For *communion* is of *two*, and not of *one*. Take *married* love, in its pure perfection the highest type of human affection: is not its very essence and charm and power that each heart sheds its love upon *another*, and each feels the thrill of that other's answering love? The very core of love is in the fact that there are two persons, each with separate individual consciousness, each a distinct self-conscious personality.

No, the truth behind the doctrine of the Incarnation is that supreme and sublime truth of the spiritual life, expressed by Tennyson in that most profoundly inspired distich which I can never escape from quoting when it falls to me to deal with this transcendent theme:

> Speak to him, thou, for he hears, and spirit with spirit can meet,
> Closer is he than breathing, nearer than hands or feet.

VII. AN OBJECTION CONSIDERED.

In the above paragraphs I have made my appeal to the soul's experience as the only basis on which a true theory of the facts of the religious life and the relation of man to God can be built up. I have appealed to the actual response of the Unseen Spirit, whom we call God, to the pleadings of the human soul. But I shall be met by the assurance that it is precisely on a similar appeal to experience that many and many an Evangelical Christian rests his conviction that Jesus is God. Only a few weeks since I met a man who, with deep and thrilling earnest-

ness, described to me how he himself had 'found Christ.' He was a sailor, reckless, dissipated, fearing neither God nor man. His ears were familiar day and night with the oaths and foul talk of the fo'c'stle of an ocean-going ship. His own tongue was as ready with bad language as those of any of his mates. But there came to him one night a realisation of the miserable creature that he was, and in the dark night-watches his whole soul went forth with a cry for help to Christ. And lo! ere long the answer came. Christ entered into his heart and he was at peace, and black night was to him as the sun-lit day. Who should tell him after that that Jesus was not God, that Christ is not the answerer of prayer?

To which my reply is this:—The sin-stained soul did indeed project itself in the anguish of its pleading out to the Eternal Spirit of Love—which is God,—and that Spirit met the pleading of the soul with its own divine response. And on that arena the mystic drama of the spiritual life was indeed enacted. All the experience itself was

true and real and vital. But the conclusion that this was Jesus or Christ, and not Our Father, who visited that stricken spirit with healing, was only the man's own intellectual interpretation of his deep experience. There could be no mark in that experience to certify that this was Jesus Christ who spoke the speech of comfort and of strength in the chamber of the soul. Other men in other regions of the religious world have heard the like voice and have interpreted it as the Virgin, or one of the Saints, or the Buddha, or that modern prophet of the East, the Bab. In every case the spiritual experience may have been real and vital; but in every case all that a man can know is that the voice of the divine love has reached him. And, as for Jesus, he referred that love to the Heavenly Father, and taught men to hear his voice in these whisperings of the spirit of the All-holy in the heart. And his counsel, at any rate, to us all, is to pray to his Father and ours knowing that his ear is always open to our cry and that he is the perfect and eternal love.

And so when our earnest, eager Evangelical neighbours arraign us with so many vehement reproaches that we do not pray to Jesus Christ, but go straight to the One Everlasting God, his Father and ours, we are content to go back to the clear and simple teaching of his Gospel, before ever men had thought of making *him* the God of whom he spoke, the teaching which comes to us so rich and clear and beautiful from parable and precept and beatitude, the teaching which bids us pray to the Father, the Father who seeth in secret, trusting him with undoubting heart, that he will answer our call. And we return to the indisputable fact that Jesus threw all the glow and enthusiasm of his teaching into the doctrine that God is our Father, perfect in goodness and in love, between whom and the human soul there is no barrier at all. And we marvel that the common doctrine of the churches is the absolute denial of that central call of Jesus to us all, while they still teach that that God, whom he preached, will only hear us if we pray through that very Christ who gave his

gentle life that we might understand that the Father is ever ready to bend his gracious ear to our pleading.

VIII. THE DOCTRINE OF A UNIVERSAL INCARNATION.

A word should perhaps be said in conclusion in reference to a mode of thought which has spread rapidly in recent years, and finds frequent expression both among those who hold the Trinitarian doctrine and among those who reject that doctrine. It presents a conception of the Incarnation which has in it much that is attractive, and is far more spiritual, to my thinking, than the more orthodox forms. It accepts the view that God was truly incarnate in Jesus Christ, but it goes on to say that in like manner he is incarnate in all good men,—that there is, indeed, a divine spark in all of us, which is truly no other than the divine dwelling in the human. That this view is based on a fundamental fact of our nature, I, for one, do not doubt. It is simply a mode of stating the close touch between God and

the human soul; a recognition that there is an element in the human spirit which responds to the touch of the Spirit of God. It is a way of conceiving that fundamental spiritual fact, the communion of the soul of man with God, which has everywhere been recognised throughout this book, and is the bottom fact of spiritual religion. And if it helps any mind to realise that fact more vividly, I would not eagerly bring severe criticism to bear upon it. The only thing against which I would earnestly warn the religious thinker is any approach to so conceiving these profound phenomena of the inward life as to think of the personality of God as being merged in the human person, or the personality of the man as being merged in the person of God. Hold fast to the fact that God and the man are not one, but two. Be clear that the communion between them is not a mere monologue within the soul of the man, two elements thereof acting and reacting on each other. Steadfastly recognise that prayer and its response, and all fellowship of the human soul with God is

a drama between two beings, each having his own indestructible centre of personality. Then it does not much matter if you choose to describe the relation in which God stands to the man as 'incarnation.'

Such language, indeed, to me is not helpful. How the human soul itself is connected with the material flesh with which it seems to be associated, I am wholly unable to understand. I am only sure that that soul is greater than the flesh, and will survive its death and decay, being disengaged from the association which has served its purpose during the earthly years. And it does not help me personally, or make things clearer to me, to use language which seems to associate the Spirit of God, as well as the human soul, with this fleshly tabernacle. The intercourse of the divine spirit and human is, I am persuaded, an intercourse absolutely spiritual and in its essence free from fleshly elements. And the metaphor of 'incarnation,' which word is simply Latin for English 'enfleshing,' does not make it easier to understand.

But that God does enter into communion

spirit to spirit and heart to heart with his human children, that fact stands clear and luminous above all particular explanations or conceptions thereof which may be offered for our consideration. And therein lies the richness of our hope and the wonderful fulfilling of our joy.

THE END.

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